ATTEMPTS TO LINK ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGY AND TRAINING STRATEGY IN THE NEW CIVIL SERVICE: AN EVALUATION

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

BEM	Business Excellence Model
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CBT	Computer Based Training
CGNTO	Central Government National Training Organisation
CMPS	Centre for Management and Policy Studies
CSC	Civil Service College
CSD	Civil Service Department
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DCT	Developing Careers Together
EFQM	European Foundation for Quality Management
FMI	Financial Management Initiative
GSI	Government Secure Intranet
GTN	Government Telephone Network
HR	Human Resource
HRD	Human Resource Development
HRM	Human Resource Management
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IiP	Investors in People
IPD	Institute of Personnel and Development
IT	Information Technology
MBA	Master of Business Administration
MCI	Management Charter Initiative
MPO	Management and Personnel Office
NHS	National Health Service
NPM	New Public Management
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
PDP	Personal Development Plan
PFI	Private Finance Initiative
PPP	Public Private Partnership
PSA	Public Service Agreement
RAS	Recruitment and Assessment Services
SDC	Staff Development Co-ordinator
SDU	Staff Development Unit
SVQ	Scottish Vocational Qualification

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and does not contain any material which has been used before or which has been published.

I also confirm that the thesis has not been submitted for a degree at another University.

Signed: J.M. Hockey

Date: 13th December 2000

SUMMARY

The literature on strategic human resource management (HRM) includes much discussion about the importance of linking organisational strategy and HRM strategy and little agreement about how the integration of these strategies should be achieved. As an integral part of HRM, training strategy is an important element in this on-going debate. This thesis seeks to add to the existing body of knowledge in the research area by focusing on a large decentralised public sector organisation that has experienced fundamental change over two decades and has tried to link its organisational strategy and its training strategy. The evaluation of the attempt by the Civil Service to make these links in strategy forms the basis of the case study research.

Middle managers working in Civil Service departments and agencies have been selected as the primary source of information that has been collected by using a combination of focus groups, a survey questionnaire and one-to-one follow-up interviews with a selection of survey respondents. In addition, documentary evidence has been used to help explain the organisational strategy and the training strategy of the Civil Service, and to corroborate evidence from other sources.

The research findings confirm the difficulties experienced by decentralised organisations when trying to link their organisational strategy and their training strategy, and the need for the corporate centre to understand how strategies will translate into action on the ground. The thesis argues that unless the linking mechanisms selected in the training strategy are compatible with the organisational strategy and complementary and compatible with one another, linkages will be incomplete. The conflicting pressures on line managers to achieve business and people objectives have been identified from the research. Their crucial managerial responsibilities for linking organisational strategy and training strategy is emphasised together with recommendations for strengthening this role in the future.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

> "The people who work in the Civil Service are special. Chosen on merit, at all levels, for your ability, you have a vital role to play in increasing the prosperity and raising the well-being of the country.... But you can only be successful, and improve the levels of performance in the Civil Service, if you have the right tools to do the work. As minister with responsibility for the Civil Service, I take a close personal interest in the training and development provision available to staff...."
>
> Roger Freeman
>
> Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
>
> July 1996

This quote by Roger Freeman in his foreword to the *Development and Training for Civil Servants: A Framework for Action* White Paper (HMSO, 1996) introduced a document which set out a new programme for action on training and development across the UK Civil Service. It spelt out the training policy that the Government expected the decentralised Civil Service departments and agencies to deliver. The definition of policy in this context is "a declared mode of action for the future" (Torrington and Hall, 1991, p.33). As such the White Paper was a reflection of the planning that had been undertaken in the Cabinet Office as the corporate centre of Government to try and ensure that civil servants were properly trained and developed to

achieve the desired improvements in Civil Service performance. A demanding change programme was implemented in the Civil Service as part of the previous Conservative Government's reform agenda, and a series of policy documents have outlined the organisational strategy of that administration and the present Labour Government. As Torrington and Hall (1991, p.34) point out, the distinction between policy and strategy is rarely clear "although strategy is usually related to planning what is to be achieved, and policy is the framework within which the plans to implement the strategy will be put into operation". In the Civil Service context therefore the plans to give civil servants "the right tools to do the work" through training as outlined in the *Development and Training for Civil Servants* White Paper (HMSO, 1996) may be regarded as the training strategy, whilst those to "improve the levels of performance in the Civil Service" as contained in the various reform initiatives can be viewed as the organisational strategy.

As an important public sector organisation that has undergone rapid and fundamental change over the past two decades, the Civil Service is an example of one that has tried to link its organisational strategy and its training strategy. The attempts that have been made to do this are explored in this case study which seeks to explain what is the nature of the relationship, namely why the Civil Service has attempted to link organisational strategy to training strategy in its departments and agencies, and how these links operate in practice. There is an acceptance that the process of strategic management is complex, and that textbook prescriptions about strategy formulation and implementation may not necessarily work as described when applied in the "political and cultural arenas" that exist in reality in organisations (Johnson and Scholes, 1989, p.16). It is also agreed that the absence of formal strategic planning in organisations

does not imply that there is no strategy; it just makes it more difficult for researchers into this subject to gather data (Boxall, 1996, p.61). This thesis does not attempt to enter the debate concerning the nature, form and reality of organisational strategy, but the research methodology does benefit from the policy documents that are available which outline the organisational and training strategy of the Civil Service.

This thesis reviews the research issue about the importance of linking organisational strategy and training strategy and from this review goes on to test the following hypothesis:

- that when linking organisational strategy and training strategy the linking mechanisms selected in the training strategy selected need to be compatible with the organisational strategy and complementary and compatible with one another.

The thinking behind the attempts to link organisational strategy and training strategy in the Civil Service has its roots in the human resource management (HRM) philosophy which, "if not a coherent set of policies and employment practices, ... has been adopted by some managements which see it as a means of achieving commitment to their organisation's objectives" (Armstrong, 1996, p.139). The next section of this chapter explores this philosophy in more detail, looking briefly at the history and some definitions of human resource management, and training and development as a key component of the HRM package, before moving on to look at the arguments surrounding the benefits and problems of linking organisational strategy and training strategy, and the choice of the Civil Service as a case study to explore these issue in more detail.

THE HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PHILOSOPHY

WHAT IS HRM?: A BRIEF HISTORY AND DEFINITIONS

Many academics have written about the history of HRM. The challenge of international competition, especially from Japan, and the effect of recession and trade crises in the 1970s and 1980s encouraged managers in western industrial nations to think again about the methods that they were using, particularly those that involved people management (Goss, 1994, p.4-5). Goss (1994) refers to the organisational restructuring that took place in the UK and the US involving changes in production processes and management styles in private industry, and a drive for efficiency and effectiveness in the public sector. The associated downsizing can be better appreciated in the Civil Service by a look at the staff numbers employed. From its peak of 751,000 civil servants in 1976, the number of permanent civil servants reduced to 463,000 at 1 April 1998, a drop of 37% over a 22 year period (Cabinet Office, 1998a, p.7).

Some people argue that the pressures in the external environment of private sector organisations resulted in a new paradigm whereby management were required to rethink the sources of competitive advantage, and in some cases move their attention away from competing on cost to competing on quality. This led to the requirement for a quality workforce which is committed and flexible, capable of being trained to take on new and challenging tasks (Sisson, 1994, p.3 and 7). However, Sisson (1994, p.4) is sceptical about the reality of HRM as opposed to the rhetoric, suggesting that instead of developing a more strategic approach to managing human resources as a source of competitive advantage, some organisations are "muddling through". Whether or not this is in fact the case, the key starting point as Sisson (1994, p.5) says in his analysis is the recognition that people are not simply another factor of production such as money

and machinery but rather the way that people are managed is of central importance to business success. The resource-based view of the firm has moved the focus of the literature on strategy away from "the importance of a firm's positioning within an industry as the key source of competitive advantage" towards instead "the internal processes which enable a firm to develop competitive advantage" (Bach and Sisson, 2000, p.5). Some of the research evidence (Huselid, 1995; MacDuffie, 1995) on the impact on organisational performance of what has come to be described as High Performance Work Practices will be examined later in this chapter when we look in more depth at the resource-based view of the firm.

Whilst most of the literature on the history of HRM refers to the developments that have taken place in the private sector, the Civil Service has made a public acknowledgement of the contribution made by its people to further improving efficiency in departments and agencies in the *Continuity and Change* White Paper (HMSO, 1994). To meet the challenge of delivering high quality in the advice and support given to Ministers and in the management and delivery of public services, the Civil Service needs:

> "To make better use of its most important resource – the staff of departments and agencies – by providing the prospect of a career with a good employer, offering challenge and reward; by developing their skills to meet the managerial, technical and competitive challenges they face; and by ensuring equality of opportunity for all members of staff, irrespective of background, gender, race and disability"
>
> (HMSO, 1994, p.31).

This statement is clearly in line with the HRM philosophy and although the term 'HRM' is itself an area of "difficult definitions and contentious theory" as a result of the "troublesome intellectual terrain that HRM occupies" (Boxall, 1996, p.59), a working definition of this way of managing people taken from Goss (1994) is offered here:

> "A diverse body of thought and practice, loosely unified by a concern to integrate the management of personnel more closely with the core management activity of organisations".
>
> (Goss, 1994, p.1)

This somewhat general description of HRM, focuses on the strategic issues, and highlights the difficulties associated with definitions. Whilst accepting that these issues are important in the personnel management and human resource management debate, had a tighter definition of HRM been agreed at the beginning of the dialogue about the meaning of HRM, the subsequent discussions about the differences may have been more focused (Keep, 1989, p.117).

In order to make sense of the variety of definitions of HRM, it can be helpful to consider them in terms of two dimensions; the 'soft-hard' dimension and the 'loose-tight' dimension (Guest, 1989, p.48). The first, the 'soft-hard' dimension depends on whether the emphasis is on the 'soft' version of HRM which "traces its roots to the human-relations school; it emphasises communication, motivation and leadership", or on the 'hard' version which "emphasises the quantitative, calculative and business-

strategic aspects of managing the headcounts resource in as 'rational' a way as for any other economic factor" (Storey, 1989, p.8). The second dimension, the 'loose-tight' is dependent on whether HRM is loosely or tightly defined. Guest (1989, p.48) says at the 'loose' end HRM is no more than another name for personnel management – "old wine in new bottles" as he chooses to call it. By contrast, in the 'tight' definition of HRM the emphasis is on strategic human resource management which, in Guest's words in that same article, "considers how human resources fit into and are utilised in the organisation, how human resources are to be managed and how the sub-components, such as selection, training and remuneration, fit into a coherent whole". Guest (1989, p.49) uses these dimensions to devise his own theory of HRM which is tightly defined but which encompasses the 'soft' and 'hard' components of human resource management definitions. His HRM 'theory' has four main components: a set of human resource outcomes (strategic integration, commitment, flexibility and quality); a set of HRM policies, including training and development; the "cement that binds the system" such as senior leadership support; and a number of organisational outcomes like high job performance and cost-effectiveness. Guests proposes that "if an organisation utilises the policy areas listed in pursuit of the four HRM policy goals in a supportive organisational context, then positive outcomes should ensue. Put this way, its seems relatively simple and plausible. In practice it is rather more difficult" (p.50).

The fact that the term human resource management can be applied to so many situations can be problematic for researchers working within the HRM movement (Keep, 1989, p.110). Research into the new HRM paradigm using practising personnel directors as the data collection source concluded that the same process and activities are being given different labels (HRM and personnel management) by different groups of personnel

directors; the focus on the difference between titles is therefore a sterile debate (Gennard and Kelly, 1994, p.27). Interestingly though, a survey of recruitment advertisements during the period 1 January to 19 March, 1999 identified that the term "personnel" in job titles is becoming outdated in the private sector with 425 HR jobs advertised and only 149 personnel roles (People Management, May 1999, p.17). In the public sector the term personnel management still predominates; of 1834 "personnel" contacts on the Civil Service College marketing database in 1999, less than 10 had human resource management in their recorded job title. Despite the absence of change in job titles, however, as a decentralised organisation, the Civil Service is looking to go beyond personnel management to a more strategic management of human resources. This case study will therefore add an important public sector context to the on-going debate about HRM issues whilst accepting that there is still no consensus about whether HRM is a proper management theory or not (Noon, 1992, p.16).

The ambiguity about definitions of HRM is matched by the lack of agreement amongst theorists and practitioners as to how the integration of human resource management strategy and organisational strategy should be achieved (Goss, 1994, p.1). The 'ideal type' of HRM characteristics that might exist if the appropriate conditions were present in an organisation contains twenty seven points of difference between personnel and human resource management (Storey, 1992, p.35). The points relate to Storey's (1995, p.6) HRM model and were used as the basis for a checklist in his research with fifteen UK organisations which revealed a significant move towards many of these human resource management type approaches (Storey, 1992, p.82). Whilst the Civil Service case study is not seeking primarily to identify how far HRM practices have been adopted in departments and agencies, a number of the developments described in

Storey's research will be familiar to civil servants, and they link to the data collected about training strategy and linking mechanisms.

Training and Development as a Key Component of HRM

Given the amount of literature published on human resource management, it is somewhat surprising that so little of it focuses on training and development as a key component of HRM. Yet this activity should be regarded as a central element of HRM on almost any realistic definition of the term, but most particularly to one that emphasises the strategic approach to human resource management (Keep, 1989, p.111). As Keep points out (p.111), "if the term human resource management is to be taken as something more than an empty 'buzz phrase'" then the word 'human' can only relate to the organisation's employees, the word 'resource' implies investment and the word 'management' "implies that strategies aimed at the motivation, development and deployment of this resource and its associated investment will be directed in such a way as to maximise its potential". On the other hand, companies who regard their employees as a cost or a commodity and do not therefore invest in training and developing them "cannot meaningfully be said to be practising human resource management". The more traditional personnel management "how to" texts include at least a chapter, if not a section, on training and development methods and techniques. In the same way as definitions of personnel management stress the activities that need to be undertaken (Torrington and Hall, 1991, p.12) so does HRM need a 'content' and a 'form', namely a way in which various techniques are chosen and integrated with other organisational policies; this distinguishes the strategic intent of the latter from the isolated approaches of the former (Goss, 1994, p.15).

Storey's (1995, p.5) definition of HRM as "a distinctive approach to employment management which seeks to achieve competitive advantage through the strategic deployment of a highly committed and capable workforce, using an integrated array of cultural, structural and personnel techniques" clearly has implications for training and development. The issue of commitment is an interesting one. The contention is that commitment is positive and that it can be influenced by HRM practices but the opposite viewpoint is that commitment may not be beneficial for either the employee or the organisation (Iles, Mabey and Robertson, 1990, p.148). Iles, Mabey and Robertson make the point that employee commitment is multifaceted (to employment, job, organisation and career) and not all types of commitment will be advantageous for the organisation. Employee commitment in one area does not necessarily mean there will be commitment in another and even within a single basis of commitment there may be conflicting priorities to different stakeholders (p.153). Their review clearly has implications for development activities and they warn against "over-simple solutions and over-general models" (1990, p.155). Indeed Legge (1995, p.203) argues that the downside of developing a strong organisational culture to which employees are committed is "an inward looking, conformist, complacent organisation, sunk in a morass of group-think, rigid, rather than flexible in its outlook".

Despite widespread agreement that training should be encouraged because of its positive effect on productivity, economic performance and commitment (Ashton and Felstead, 1995, p.234), there has been little research evidence to substantiate claims that it produces increases in company's bottom line results (Craven, 1998, p.151). The most frequently made point in the debate about the effect of HRM practices on high performance is that rather than HR initiatives themselves causing the performance

results, "it may be the highly performing companies which can afford costly HR practices" (Edwards and Wright, 1999, p.11). Research suggests that whilst there is no over-arching theory on how to make training pay in organisations, there is a need to examine organisations where the perception is that training has contributed to economic success and to try to pull out some guiding principles (Lee, 1996, p.5). The evidence from the case studies described by Lee (1996) is that managers in organisations with a higher level of training maturity look to training to support strategy. "Where a distinct financial return from training can be demonstrated, this may support the argument for it but the more that training is shown to pay forward in supporting and enabling other processes of organisational change, the less the training itself is required to show pay-back" (p.73). Although there are examples of good training practice in large companies, there are numerous pieces of evidence to support the view that the majority of employers have failed to accept the importance of investment in training and development; this finding has serious implications for the take-up of HRM more generally (Keep, 1989, 117). For clarity about the meaning of training and development in this context a definition is offered here:

> "Training is the systematic modification of behaviour through learning which occurs as a result of education, instruction, development and planned experience".
>
> (Armstrong, 1996 p.529)

This definition of training which includes development makes the point that from an HRM perspective training and development should be considered linked (Goss, 1994, p.63). Goss says the "the connection between training and development must be

regarded as highly interactive, each facilitating the other, in what may be thought of as a dialectical relationship".

The role of training in helping organisations to address skills shortages has been demonstrated by a survey of 40 companies undertaken by the Confederation of British Industry (CBI, 1989). A key finding of that survey was that companies which described themselves as leaders in their market with a proactive attitude towards commercial challenges, have no difficulty in accepting the contribution made by skills development towards the achievement of business objectives (p.35). The optimistic undertone of the CBI survey is diminished somewhat by a subsequent study of management attitudes to training and skills shortages in 23 companies in the engineering industry (Goss and Jones, 1992). This study identified that many organisations, despite facing difficulties in acquiring sufficient skills to meet the pressures in their internal and external environments, still remained reluctant to adopt training and development techniques to deal with these challenges. Resourcing of training activity, poaching by other employers and the perceived difficulty of obtaining good trainees were all identified as resistances by management to adopting more creative approaches to training provision. These findings add substance to the contention that there are other strategies that companies can adopt to survive and grow. Whilst this may be the case there is broad research evidence to support the argument that investments in High Performance Work Practices are associated with lower employee turnover, greater productivity and corporate financial performance (Huselid, 1995, p.667). As a key component of HRM, non-investment by management in training and development makes it hard to accept that there is a commitment to strategic human resource management (Keep, 1989, p.120). As an example of an organisation that has made a stated intention to train and

develop civil servants so that business plans can be realised, the Civil Service as a case study provides the opportunity to further explore these issues.

THE BENEFITS AND PROBLEMS OF LINKING ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGY AND TRAINING STRATEGY

STRATEGIC HRM

In the same way as the term "personnel management" has moved towards being known as "human resource management" so there has been a shift towards using the word "strategic" to describe HRM as a way of managing an organisation's workforce (Legge, 1989, p.19). Reference was made to the word "strategy" in the introduction to this chapter where it was described as relating to planning what is to be achieved, as opposed to policy which is the framework within which the plans are implemented (Torrington and Hall, 1991, p.34). Storey' definition of HRM included the words, the "strategic deployment (of a highly committed and capable workforce)" (Storey, 1995, p.5). To elaborate Storey's definition, a further distinction can be made between strategy, strategic planning and strategic management whereby strategy is "the means chosen to reach a predetermined objective", strategic planning "the process of determining the objectives (ends) and the strategies (means) and ensuring implementation", and strategic management that activity which "embraces a greater concern for the whole process of strategic change" (Hussey, 1996, p.18). David Hussey's distinction sees strategic management as a more comprehensive way of managing an organisation which adds internal elements such as such as structure and climate to those of implementation and control, and social development (p.19).

A conceptual framework for strategic human resource management developed in the US in the early 1980s explored the link between HRM and the formulation and implementation of strategic organisational objectives (Devanna, Fombrun and Tichy, 1984. p.34-51). This framework included HRM as an integral tool of strategic management and saw the critical task of managers being one of aligning the formal structure (the way in which the organisation is designed to carry out its objectives) and HRM systems (p.35). It included "strategic development" alongside strategic selection, appraisal and rewards as a way of ensuring that organisations were successful in implementing strategic objectives (p.43-49). Strategic development has been defined as:

> "Strategic human resource development is the identification of needed skills and active management of employee learning for the long-range future in relation to explicit corporate and business strategies".
>
> (Hall, 1984, p.159).

Hall (1984, p.160) makes the point that on this definition the strategic development of human resources is rarely found in organisations because most development is short-term, involving little financial investment and few linkages to explicit organisational strategy; he is therefore sceptical about how far management evaluate the way in which training and development can promote organisational objectives and informs, and is affected by, the business plan.

Here in the UK, the Institute of Personnel and Development (IPD), in the belief that there is increasing evidence that sophisticated people management is positively related

to superior organisational performance, is spearheading a two to three year project which is investigating the benefits business gains from taking a strategic approach to the management of people (Baron, 1999, p.89). The evaluation of HRM continues to be a problem as a result of the ambiguity that still surrounds the personnel management role; more robust techniques are therefore required if HRM is to have strategic prospects (Tyson, 1995, p.15). It should be accepted though that this is more than a technical problem which will be resolved just by using more stringent techniques. Given the volume and timescales of organisational change, and its impact on organisational and HRM strategies, even the most robust systems can be swamped by seemingly impossible demands.

Devanna, Fombrun and Tichy (1984, p.51) believe that success in the implementation of strategic objectives is determined by the effectiveness of the organisation in the way it has, "selected the right people, measured the proper behaviours, rewarded progress against the strategic objectives, and developed the skills needed to ensure the success of the strategy". The UK Civil Service experience in attempting to develop the skills (or in the words of Roger Freeman, to give civil servants "the right tools") to deliver the desired organisational performance objectives has highlighted some of the issues and problems which will add to the body of knowledge on this subject. The corporate strategy on development and training for civil servants has been formulated against a backdrop of organisational change, not least the further decentralisation of civil service departments into agencies. This chapter on the background to the research would not therefore be complete without an analysis of what the literature has to say about the impact of corporate strategy on HRM.

THE CHALLENGE OF DECENTRALISATION

One of the characteristics of HRM is the argument for the matching of HRM policies with business strategy, in particular that those policies connected with strategic management activities such as training and development should fit the stage of development of the organisation (Legge, 1989, p.29). "As the organisation grows and develops, it needs change. By understanding how an organisation changes as it grows, one can understand how human resource management must change" (Baird and Meshoulam, 1988, p.116). This external fit between HRM and the organisation's stage of development was examined by Baird and Meshoulam (1988) and they proposed five organisational stages: initiation, functional growth, controlled growth, functional integration, and strategic integration, and described the human resource management programmes, practices and procedures at each of the stages (p.118-121). In their model decentralisation happens in stage four, functional integration, where management focuses on the interdependencies among specialised activities and "corporate staffs face growing pressure both to decentralise and to focus on strategic issues. Although organisational, geographic, and product diversification create the possibility of redundant activities, they also create opportunities for greater efficiency through planning and co-ordination" (p.118). They conclude that HRM must pass through each stage in sequence and state that, "If a stage is skipped, performance in later stages will be ineffective and the organisation must first return to those stages and put them in place" (p.121).

The corporate office in large multi-divisional companies is seen as having four main roles, namely the development and implementation of strategies, the monitoring of divisional performance, the allocation of internal finance and relations management

with the external capital markets, and all four roles impact on HRM (Purcell, 1989, p.67). Purcell (1989, p.70) asserts that strategic decision making is more complex in multi-divisional organisations and he differentiates between long-range "upstream, first-order" decisions concerned with the future direction of the company affecting the size of the firm, characteristics of employees, and technological requirements, and "downstream, second and third-order" decisions on organisational structures (authority levels etc) and human resource management. Building on the earlier work of Goold and Campbell (1987), Purcell (1989) examined how trends in first and second order strategy, particularly towards diversification and decentralisation in private sector companies, affect HRM, focusing on portfolio planning techniques as a way of allocating capital and determining the business mix according to the relative attractiveness in the firm's portfolio. His pessimistic conclusion (p.90) was that decentralised organisations with devolved accountability for profits, and emphasising a performance-control system, will find it harder at the corporate level to "develop integrated and meaningful institutional strategies" and more difficult at the unit level "to develop and maintain long-run human resource policies". He says, "current trends in corporate strategy in many large diversified companies render the ideals of human resource management, as specified by Guest (1987), unobtainable". Some of the problems that the Civil Service has experienced in its attempt to link organisational strategy and training strategy that will be described in this case study relate to this contention.

The thrust of Purcell's (1989) work was primarily with first and second-order strategies rather than with strategies within HRM. Research into the strategic choices open to senior management, both within the line function and in HRM, identified some special

characteristics about employee relations management in multi-divisional companies (Ahlstrand and Purcell, 1988). Ahlstrand and Purcell (1988, p.3) focused on four areas of strategic choice: "the control and co-ordination of collective bargaining; the division of responsibility between corporate, divisional and establishment personnel departments; the configuration of labour markets; and the development of management styles towards employees". Their findings (1988, p.6-10) were that the choices of bargaining levels and the responsibilities for the respective personnel functions were neither strongly centralised or decentralised, whilst case study companies were found to be experimenting with and segmenting labour markets, and influenced by opportunism and pragmatism in their people management. There was therefore diversity of practice in each of those four strategic choice areas with a changed choice in any one area having considerable effects on the other three but invariably in an unplanned, unexpected way resulting in tensions resolved through argument. Once more, the issues are complex and demonstrate the difficulty of linking organisational and HRM strategy in multi-divisional organisations like the Civil Service.

The matching process to achieve external fit may be achieved at the expense of denying the internal fit with soft HRM values and the tensions created by the potentially conflicting requirements of external and internal fit will result in pragmatic approaches that are contrary to the strategic intentions of HRM (Legge, 1989, p.39). Not only must HRM fit the organisation's stage of development but the components of human resource management must also fit with and support each other (Baird and Meshoulam, (1988, p.122). Baird and Meshoulam (1988, p.122-123) describe six strategic components of HRM which must fit with each other: management awareness,

management of the HR function, a portfolio of programmes, personnel skills, information technology and awareness of the environment. They state, "the components cannot remain out of alignment over a long time period without wasting resources. If inadequate skills prevent use of an information system, time and money are lost. If advanced programmes are developed but never implemented, they are useless" (p.123). They go on to say about external and internal fit, "Obviously, the two fits interact and must be managed simultaneously" and present a Human Resource Strategic Matrix which combines the strategic components (p.124). Creating a strategic impact for HRM in organisations probably requires a systems focus with senior managers in the line and in the HR function paying attention to alignments both within HR systems to achieve an internal fit, and with operating and strategic objectives to achieve an external fit (Becker and Gerhart, 1996, p.797).

Given the difficulties of managing external and internal fit in multi-divisional organisations such as the Civil Service, and having described what is meant by strategic HRM, and the particular challenges facing decentralised organisations in adopting this approach, we now turn to another piece of theory which helps conceptualise the precise nature of the issues being addressed in this case study.

THE RESOURCE-BASED VIEW OF THE FIRM

The matching characteristics of HRM are based on reactive notions about the contribution of HR strategy; the resource-based view of the firm offers an alternative way of theorising this contribution (Boxall, 1996). Boxall (1996, p.66) says that, "by hiring and developing talented staff and 'synergising' their contributions within the resource bundle of the firm, HRM may lay the basis for sustained competitive

advantage". He therefore sees the resource-based perspective as questioning the competitive value of HRM policies and practices themselves; that is, whether they are easily replicated and transferable or "socially complex" and "historically sensitive". His conclusion is that whilst it will be possible to identify companies which have developed human resources as a source of competitive advantage in their own industry, more research is required to identify and analyse the sources of this advantage.

A special research forum on human resource management and organisational performance (Becker and Gerhart, 1996) concluded that the evidence from research which has attempted to identify best HRM practices and their fit with other policies is inconclusive, and much of it has focused on the relationship between a single HR practice and a firm's performance (p.782). Becker and Gerhart (1996) make the point that rather than being additive, the implicit systems perspective of the resource-based view of the firm suggests instead that resources need to be complementary in order to generate competitive advantage. Their work, however, does support a link between HRM and organisational performance but they add that "whether these value-creating HR practices are sufficiently rare and inimitable to create sustained competitive advantage probably depends in part on the nature of their overall configuration and fit". They warn too of the downside to tightly coupled HR systems which may be inflexible as a result of their complexity (p.789).

One of the first tests of the prediction that the organisational performance impact of High Performance Work Practices is contingent on both the degree of complementarity, or internal fit, among these practices and the degree of alignment, or external fit, between the firm's HRM strategy and its competitive strategy was undertaken by

Huselid (1995). However, despite finding evidence that High Performance Work Practices will be reflected in increased organisational performance, Huselid (1995, p.667) found only modest evidence that a better internal fit will positively affect performance, and little evidence for external fit. His surprise at these results, given the compelling theoretical arguments about the importance of internal and external fit, lead him to suggest that more research is required in this area (p.668). The research issue about the importance of linking organisational strategy and training strategy which is reviewed in this thesis, and the testing of the hypothesis concerning the nature of training strategy linking mechanisms, adds to the body of knowledge on this subject.

Other research lends support to the hypothesis "that innovative HR practices affect performance not individually but as interrelated elements in an internally consistent HR 'bundle' or system" (MacDuffie, 1995, p.197). MacDuffie's study of car assembly plants found that "these HR bundles contribute most to assembly plant productivity and quality when they are integrated with manufacturing policies under the 'organisational logic' of a flexible production system" (p.197). The innovative HR practices included in the 'bundle' covered work teams, quality circles, employee suggestions, job rotation and decentralisation of quality related tasks (p.203). MacDuffie (1995) concludes that:

> "Overall, the evidence strongly supports the hypothesis that assembly plants using flexible production systems, which bundle human resource practices into a system that is integrated with production/business strategy, outperform plants using more traditional mass production systems in both productivity and quality" (p.218).

The addition of the resource-based view of the firm to the development of strategic HRM "theory" includes another important dimension whereby in Boxall's (1996, p.61) words, strategy should be understood as "a framework of critical ends and means", and not simply equated with the firm's competitive choices. This theoretical framework is particularly important in the context of the Civil Service case study as the concepts of competitive advantage are more difficult to relate to in the public sector.

STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

A definition of strategic human resource development (Hall, 1984, p.159) was offered in the description of a framework for strategic human resource management. That section, and the subsequent two describing the challenge of decentralisation and the resource-based view of the firm, have highlighted some of the benefits and problems of linking organisational strategy and training strategy in the context of the philosophy of human resource management. This final section in that category focuses specifically on the issues associated with human resource development (HRD) in as much as they relate to the subject of this case study. The point has been well made that whilst the changes in personnel have been widely investigated (and are reported in this thesis), there is a lack of research on the changing nature of the strategic use of the training function (Rainbird, 1994, p.72). Rainbird (1994) examined the organisation of training by means of case study evidence collected from twenty-one organisations in seven sectors (mainly multi-divisional companies in the private sector) with the aim of determining factors affecting organisational decision-making concerning training for new recruits, and continuing training for employees. She concluded that, despite

evidence of more senior management interest in training leading to more consideration about integrating it into strategic plans:

> "Neither the integration of the training function into other policy areas nor the integration of employees through their involvement in training programmes has occurred to any great extent in the organisations studied. This would suggest that the implementation of HRM has been piecemeal at best" (p.87).

Her research identified four main problems in linking organisational strategy and HRM strategy: firstly, that the training function is not always well integrated with wider personnel responsibilities; secondly, business and HRM strategies may conflict with priority given to business strategies; thirdly, financial procedures make training expenditure vulnerable to cost-cutting; and finally, line managers are insufficiently prepared to take on the responsibilities for HR planning. These findings are clearly of fundamental importance as background information for the Civil Service case study which seeks to build on this research by focusing on one large multi-divisional public sector organisation to explore the attempts made to link organisational strategy with training strategy.

It has been suggested that there are five critical steps to establishing HRD within a strategic framework of the business (Harrison, 1997, p.23). Harrison (1997) gives these as:

- relating investment in HRD to the vision, values and strategic goals of the organisation;

- having a clear and internally consistent employee resource strategy within which HRD goals are established;
- formulating an HRD strategy to meet those HRD goals;
- agreeing realistic, specific, measurable and properly costed HRD plans that are consistent with the wider employee resource framework and business strategy; and,
- establishing mechanisms for monitoring and corrective action.

Her contention mirrors that of other academics, namely that strategic HRD is not really happening in the UK mainly because personnel practices and systems have failed to provide an adequate framework to support a strategic approach to HRD and also, she says, because there is a lack of incentives for people and organisations to invest in training and development (1997, p.25). The Civil Service is an example of an organisation that has tried to make HRD happen in its departments and agencies, and the research that has been undertaken in this case study explores these attempts.

THE CIVIL SERVICE

CIVIL SERVANTS AS PUBLIC SERVANTS

Whilst the 463,000 permanent civil servants in employment constitute less than 2% of the working population, they make up about 10% of all public sector employees (Cabinet Office, 1998a, p.4). As the *Civil Service Statistics 1998* state, more than three quarters of all civil servants work in executive agencies established under the Next Steps programme for improving management in government; many of them are involved in providing services to the public and others provide policy advice. Departments vary greatly in size: four of the largest government departments, namely

Defence, Social Security, Inland Revenue and the Home Office (including the Prison Service) together account for two-thirds of all civil servants, the four smallest departments have less than 30 staff each (p.5). The size and diversity of the Civil Service alone makes it a suitable choice for case study research. More importantly, however, the Civil Service has experienced fundamental and far reaching organisational change in the past two decades which has had major implications for its training strategy. The organisational strategy and training strategy of the Civil Service will be explored in depth in chapters 3, 4 and 5 of this thesis.

THE ROLE OF THE GOVERNMENT IN HRM ISSUES

The government contributes to personnel management issues in a number of different ways:

- by its policies and programmes designed to manage the economy;
- by employment legislation and regulations and the legal framework for trade unions;
- by setting up services, executives, commissions and agencies;
- by developing the national vocational education and training framework and initiatives such as Investors in People; and
- in its capacity as an employer (Armstrong, 1996, p.42).

Changes in the public sector associated with privatisation, reorganisation, cost-cutting and efficiency improvements, combined with market testing, sub-contracting and the movement away from standardised terms and conditions of employment mean that "the traditional role of the public sector as the 'good' or 'model' employer, setting standards for others to follow, has effectively been abandoned" (Sisson, 1994, p.20).

Despite this development, the government still has an interest in HRM issues. As Armstrong (1996, p.42) says, it funds Investors in People (IiP) which is a national standard for linking training and development activities within organisations to business strategy, administered at a local level by the Training and Enterprise Councils under a strict procedure monitored by Investors in People UK, a non-departmental government body (Alberga, Tyson and Parsons, 1997, p.47). Launched in October 1991, the IiP process has been given added emphasis by being incorporated into the National Targets for Education and Training which were also set in 1991 and then subsequently revised (Mason, 1995, p.1). Mason explains that the original target required that 50% of medium to larger organisations employing more than 500 people would have achieved the standard by 1996 with the new targets of 70% of all organisations employing 200 or more employees, and 35% of those employing 50 or more to be recognised as Investors in People by the year 2000 (p.1-2). Given this role and responsibility for Investors in People, it is perhaps unsurprising that the government should select IiP as a linking mechanism in its own training and development strategy for the Civil Service with a stated target that "by the year 2000, all civil servants will be employed in organisations recognised as Investors in People" (HMSO, 1996, p.19). The success or otherwise of the Civil Service in linking its organisational strategy and its training strategy and the mechanisms it has employed will be explored in chapter 6.

Evidence of HRD Strategy

Evidence of a strategic approach towards the training and development of their workforces is a vital component of any meaningful form of HRM (or HRD) (Keep, 1989, p.111). The Civil Service has attempted to adopt this type of approach by using

linking mechanisms outlined in the *Development and Training for Civil Servants* White Paper (HMSO, 1996). This policy document describes the training strategy for the Civil Service with monitoring systems set in place in decentralised departments and agencies to check progress against plans for improving the training and development of civil servants.

Evidence that HRD is operating effectively within the strategic framework of organisations will include signs that it is:

- "durable and meaningful"
- "aligned"
- "internally consistent"
- "management-led"
- and "expert"

(Harrison, 1997, p.28). Research into the shift to human capital as a source of sustained competitive advantage in private sector organisations has identified that a change is required in organisational timescales and interventions (Gratton, 1997, p.25). Gratton's (1997) projects identified that a movement was required away from ad-hoc initiatives in organisations to integrated reward, selection and developmental processes, implemented over a longer timescale to promote trust, supported by an active HRM strategy.

These signs then are the practical requirements for an effective HRD strategy that will help achieve organisational objectives, and the research issue of this thesis is that linking organisational strategy to a compatible training strategy is important. The "durable and meaningful" and "aligned" characteristics in Harrison's (1997) description

of an effective HRD strategy are therefore relevant in this respect. This case study, however, is not merely looking to explore how training strategy links to organisational strategy in this public sector example. It also seeks to test the hypothesis that when linking organisational strategy and training strategy the linking mechanisms selected in the training strategy need to compatible with the organisational strategy and complementary and compatible with one another. This question of "internal consistency" as one of Harrison's signs of the effectiveness of HRD is a key issue that will be examined in the research. Chapter 2 will outline the methodology that has been employed to do this, followed by chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 exploring organisational strategy, training strategy and the linking mechanisms used in the Civil Service case study. Chapter 7 will draw some key conclusions from the research which will add to the understanding of strategic HRD issues in what is increasingly being recognised as an important and complex subject.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The introduction to the previous chapter made clear that the purpose of the research is to seek to explain the relationship between organisational strategy and training strategy in the UK Civil Service. This decentralised organisation, with its diverse departments and agencies, has been selected as a case study to examine in detail why it has attempted to link organisational strategy and training strategy, how it has tried to do it, and how the linking mechanisms are working in practice.

WHAT IS A CASE STUDY?

Whilst there is no agreed definition of a case study, it can be defined as "a research strategy or design that is used to study one or more selected social phenomena and to understand or explain the phenomena by placing them in their wider context" (Kitay and Callus, 1998, p.103).

The case study as a research strategy has a distinct advantage when "a 'how' or 'why' question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control" (Yin, 1994, p.9). The precise nature of the questions addressed in this research project will be described in more detail later in this chapter. The importance of spelling out in a case study the background to the research project and the relationship with the researcher has been recognised (Whipp, 1998, p.58) and this

section therefore includes a description of the background of the researcher. We will then move on to explore the development of the research questions and hypothesis, and the methods adopted, in more detail. Subsequent sections of this chapter on the methodology will then focus on the case study as a research strategy, and how the evidence in this case study has been collected and analysed.

Background of the Researcher

To begin with the background of the researcher, she has been a civil servant since 1978 and is employed as a senior lecturer by the Civil Service College which was an agency of the Cabinet Office up to the end of March 2000. The Civil Service College has been in operation as a training establishment since 1970 and provides residential and non-residential courses at its three sites in Sunningdale, Berkshire, London and Scotland. Although its training events are open to people from the private sector, its customers work primarily in Civil Service departments and agencies, with occasional students coming from the wider public sector. The researcher directs and tutors on a number of courses covering subjects in the areas of general management and personal development. Prior to joining the College in 1994, the researcher worked as a training manager with the Employment Service. Funding for the research project has come from the Civil Service College and the research has been undertaken on a part-time basis over a four year period. The College has recently undergone an organisational review and is transferring to the newly formed Centre for Management and Policy Studies (CMPS) in the Cabinet Office. The CMPS will be involved in more research activities in the future.

Emerging research findings have been passed to the researcher's line manager and there has been contact with Cabinet Office colleagues. Some new training courses have been designed as a result of the research project and offered to civil servants in the annual College prospectus.

Developing Research Questions

The reflection on the research process advocated by Whipp (1998, p.58) is particularly relevant when considering the thinking behind the development of the research questions addressed by this case study. As has already been stated, the purpose of the case study is to explain why and how the Civil Service has attempted to link its organisational strategy and its training strategy, and how these links are operating in practice. The research questions are therefore to do with explanation rather than description. This distinction is particularly relevant to the purpose of the research and "is easy to understand on one level, and difficult to understand on another" (Punch, 1998, p.15). Punch points out that description makes complicated things understandable whereas explanation involves discovering reasons, the 'why' and 'how' rather than simply the 'what' associated with describing what has happened. However, as Punch (1998) goes on to say, "explanation requires description", and in this case study it is clear that explaining how the Civil Service has tried to link its organisational and training strategies first requires a description of what comprises these strategies and the linking mechanisms that have been used. Indeed, reflecting on the thought processes involved in formulating the research questions, much time and effort was invested in identifying these 'whats' before moving on to the 'hows'. The collection and analysis of documentary evidence has been very important in this respect and will be described more fully later.

There are two main ways of developing research questions: the first is to identify a general research area and then develop specific questions within that area; the second is to begin with specific questions and to work backwards to more general questions (Punch, 1998 p.34). The researcher adopted the latter approach in developing the research questions explored in the Civil Service case study. The specific question of interest was initially identified as being the training and development needs of civil servants. This was based on the personal work experience of the researcher, and the on-going contact with students attending training and development events at the Civil Service College. It was an interest prompted by the numerous change initiatives that had occurred in Civil Service departments and agencies, and the perceived impact on those civil servants working in the middle management grades who attended the researcher's training courses. As the Course Director of the change management programme at the College, the researcher was already engaged with some of the literature on the subject, more especially that connected with the Civil Service organisational strategy, but the literature review was extended to encompass publications on human resource management and training strategy. In this way the researcher moved upwards to more general research questions connected with organisational strategy and training strategy, and from there to the research area within the general field of enquiry of strategic HRM.

As part of the literature review, and the collection and analysis of documentary evidence in the research area, the researcher identified the *Development and Training for Civil Servants* White Paper (HMSO, 1996) as an important document. This "*Framework for Action*" as described in chapter one is seen as the training strategy of

the Civil Service, and its programme for action on training and development for civil servants contains three key elements (p.3). These elements can be regarded as the mechanisms used to link organisational strategy and training strategy in the decentralised departments and agencies. The publication of the White Paper helped the researcher develop focus in question development. The move from a specific research question to a research area generated numerous research possibilities connected with organisational strategy and training strategy but concentrating attention on attempts to link the two together reduced the size of the research project down to three general questions, subdivided into a further seven specific questions. This number of research questions is in line with the advice given by Punch (1998, p.37) who says, "it is better to have a small job done thoroughly than a large job done only superficially. More than about three or four general research questions, assuming that each is subdivided into (say) two or three specific questions, is testing the upper limit of what can be done in one study".

The research questions are as follows:

General research question:	**Why has the Civil Service tried to link organisational strategy and training strategy?**
Specific research questions:	What is the "theory" of strategic HRM? How does this "theory" apply to the Civil Service experience?
General research question:	**How has the Civil Service attempted to link organisational strategy and training strategy?**
Specific research questions:	What is the organisational strategy? What is the training strategy? What are the linking mechanisms and how do they work?

General research question:	**How well does training strategy link to organisational strategy?**
Specific research questions:	What has been the effect of the linking mechanisms in departments and agencies? What can be learnt from the Civil Service case study?

The structure of this thesis has been designed to address each of these research questions in turn. Supplying a framework for writing up the research project is one of the functions of research questions (Punch, 1998, p.38). They also help organise and delimit the project, keep the researcher focused, and point out the data that will be required. If these then are the research questions, we need to turn now to the hypothesis that the questions generate.

THE ROLE OF HYPOTHESES

A simple definition of a hypothesis is "a predicted answer to a research question" (Punch, 1998, p.39) and they are an important component of a research project when there is an explanation or theory behind them which will lead the researcher to predict an answer to a research question. Hypotheses are therefore proposed to test the theories that support them. Research projects that use this approach are described (Punch, 1998, p.16) as theory verification studies which he contrasts with studies which aim to develop theory, namely theory generation studies.

Chapter one of this thesis considered whether strategic HRM is a proper management theory or not. Whilst it is not proposed to reopen that discussion in this section, the last chapter ended with a indication of the signs that can be taken as evidence that strategic human resource development (HRD) is operating effectively in organisations (Harrison, 1997, p.28). The explanations proposed by Harrison provide predicted answers and

there is therefore a value in proposing a hypothesis for this case study. To repeat here and expand upon what has already been stated in the previous chapter, Harrison's assertion is that:

> "When HRD is operating effectively within the strategic framework of the business it will be:
>
> - durable and meaningful – integral to the long-term direction of the business
> - aligned – tied closely to the organisation's mission and strategic goals
> - internally consistent – supporting, and supported by, other employee resource policies
> - management-led – with any specialist staff playing a supportive role
> - expert – characterised by the skilful provision and management of learning that will improve current performance and lead to organisational growth".

Applying Harrison's (1997, p.28) proposition as a basis for predicting answers to the two general research questions which ask "how has the Civil Service attempted to link organisational strategy and training strategy?" and "how well does training strategy link to organisational strategy?" leads to an expectation that to be effective the strategies and the linking mechanisms need to be complementary and compatible or in Harrison's words "durable and meaningful", "aligned" and "internally consistent". Again, the question of HRD "operating effectively within the strategic framework of the business"

(Harrison, 1997, p.28) has at its roots the "theory" that linking organisational strategy and training strategy is important and this premise relates to the research issue and helps to explain why the Civil Service has tried to link its organisational strategy and its training strategy. As Harrison (1997, p.28) concludes about strategic HRD: "It also means investing carefully in initiatives related to training and continuous development of the workforce, without which there cannot be the human capability needed to ensure that business goals are achieved".

Given the research issue and the predicted answers to the research questions, the hypothesis that is being tested in this Civil Service case study is therefore as stated in chapter one, namely:

- that when linking organisational strategy and training strategy the linking mechanisms selected in the training strategy need to be compatible with the organisational strategy and complementary and compatible with one another.

The main objective of the research project is therefore to verify theory rather than to generate it where the "theory" of HRM (or HRD) is the starting point. Given the nebulous nature of the research area, and the continued lack of agreement amongst academics about the existence of unverified theories of HRM (and HRD), this primary purpose of the research project should be welcomed.

QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE METHODS

A close fit is required between research questions and research methods, and the best way of achieving this fit in a project is for the methods to follow from the questions

(Punch, 1998, p.19). This case study has used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods on the understanding that these approaches are not mutually exclusive and can be used together (Whipp, 1998, p.52). Whilst accepting that the distinction between the two methods relates to the deductive and inductive approaches to research strategy which are generally used to test theory and generate theory (Strauss and Whitfield, 1998, p.9-10), and this case study is more about theory verification as has already been stated, the research questions themselves have developed during the research project as part of a normal iterative process (Punch, 1998, p.36). Using a case study research strategy, regarded by some academics as one of the most common qualitative research methods along with interviews and ethnography (Whipp, 1998, p.53), has enabled the researcher to use research questions and methods which were more general to begin with at the start of the project and for these to become more focused as the case study progressed. Although the question development stage in a research project is pre-empirical in that content issues come before methodological ones, it is accepted that method questions will always intrude to some extent (Punch, 1998, p.37). Whilst there has never been any intention to use ethnography as a qualitative research method in this case study, this hands-on process with the researcher interacting with people over lengthy periods of time (Friedman and McDaniel, 1998, p.115) can be seen to a certain extent in the teaching role of the researcher. Care has been taken, however, not to rely on observations and comments obtained from students in the classroom but to use instead legitimate sources of case study evidence using a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques as will be described later in this chapter. Before moving on to the collection and analysis of case study evidence, however, the next section examines the case study research strategy used in this research project in more detail.

CASE STUDY RESEARCH

CHOICE OF RESEARCH STRATEGY

Although, as previously stated, there is no agreement on a definition of a case study, academics are, however, of the same opinion that case study researchers are required to use several techniques and a variety of research methods (Kitay and Callus, 1998, p.103; Yin, 1994, p.13). The case study is therefore a comprehensive research strategy (Yin, 1994, p.13; Punch, 1998, p.150) with the general objective of developing as full an understanding of the case as possible, always accepting that there may be a variety of specific purposes and research questions, as there are in this case study. The holistic focus of case studies, however, does highlight the problem of "generalisability" with case study research (Punch, 1998, p.153). The question as to how far the research findings from this case study can be generalised and applied to other situations and organisations is an important one, and this will be explored further in Chapter 7 when the lessons from the research project are discussed and considered in more detail. However, the researcher accepts that "virtually all writers on case studies assert that the findings of a well-conducted case study can be used to refine or test theory, which gives case studies a generalisability beyond the individual instance" (Kitay and Callus, 1998, p.107). This is the problem of external validity with many critics of single case studies such as this one mistakenly asserting that they offer a poor basis for generalising (Yin, 1994, p.36). The case study has been chosen as the research strategy to explain and test some important concepts and propositions, using the Civil Service experience in order to do this, and laying the foundations for further studies in the research area. As Punch (1998, p.156) says, "discovering the important features, developing an understanding of them, and conceptualising them for further study, is often best achieved through the

case study strategy". This is the reasoning behind the choice of the Civil Service case study for this research project.

Gaining and Maintaining Access to Civil Servants

Gaining access is a prerequisite stage of the research process and influences the reliability and validity of the data that is obtained by the researcher (Burgess, 1995, p.45). The key issues that Burgess identifies are "initial contacts, ethical considerations, gatekeepers, the presentation of the study and the research bargain" (p.45-50). When access is easily granted, he advocates the researcher spelling out why it was so straightforward.

In this research project the description of the background of the researcher makes clear the nature of the relationship between the researcher and those being researched. Access to civil servants was secured through their attendance on Civil Service College courses, and the training database of course participants used for data collection purposes. As a senior lecturer in the College, the researcher also had direct access to civil servants attending training courses. The access question is an important one because it is possible that the research project could be criticised for having too much access rather than too little. However, as previously stated, the researcher has made rigorous efforts not to consciously use covert research elicited from students in the classroom in order to try and avoid the ethical dilemma of research access (Burgess, 1995, p.47).

Although access to civil servants in this case study has been relatively simple, choices have been made about dealings with gatekeepers and establishing research bargains.

The research has been funded by the Director of the Management Development Group in the Civil Service College, and permission obtained from him to use the training database to identify students for the survey sample. The researcher has used her own contacts within the College to identify suitable civil servants to participate in the pre-survey focus groups, and survey respondents were a source of access to line managers who took part in the follow-up interviews. This "snowballing" effect is justified in lengthy research projects such as this one with researchers working through a network of contacts, using gatekeepers as key figures in the process (Kitay and Callus, 1998, p.109). All the sources of case study evidence mentioned in this paragraph will be described shortly. The issue of confidentiality of research findings is particularly important with case studies (Kitay and Callus, 1998, p.109). A confidentiality promise was given to everyone who participated in the case study research. Findings that have been fed to the researcher's line manager have all been non-attributable to individual respondents. Before going on to discuss in more detail how the case study evidence has been collected and analysed, the final sub-section under this main heading of case study research will look at the question of the design of this particular case study.

CASE STUDY DESIGN

One view is that it is not possible to start a case study with a predetermined research plan and that the "art" of a good case study is picking up on leads as they arise using "key informants" who have a sound knowledge of the subject area (Kitay and Callus, 1998, p.108). To an extent this is what happened in this case study with the first step in the data collection being focus groups to explore the research issues in more detail with a number of experienced civil servants. At around the same time a meeting was held

with a Development Adviser in the Cabinet Office to discuss the case study and to obtain a corporate perspective on the issues being researched.

"A research design is the logic that links the data to be collected (and the conclusions to be drawn) to the initial questions of a study" and can be a difficult part of doing case studies (Yin, 1994, p.18). Five components are particularly important: the case study questions; the propositions; the unit(s) of analysis; the logic that links the data to the propositions; and the criteria for interpreting the findings (Yin, 1994, p.20). Whilst in this case study, the questions and the hypothesis have already been discussed in detail, the unit of the analysis is important and requires clarification. The unit of analysis is the object of the case study which may be events, individuals, workplaces, occupations, organisations, industries, communities or nations (Kitay and Callus, 1998, p.105). "The definition of the unit of analysis is related to the way the initial research questions have been defined" (Yin, 1994, p.22). The unit of analysis in this case study is the Civil Service; it is therefore a single rather than a multiple-case design. The rationale for using the single-case design is that it meets Yin's (p.38) requirements as a critical case in testing HRD "theory" which has specified a clear set of propositions as described by Harrison (1997, p.28). The value of the case study therefore is in testing the hypothesis and in so doing verifying the theory and adding to it. A case study, however, may involve more than one unit of analysis (Yin, 1994, p.41). This is what Yin calls an embedded case design and applies to this case study where attention is given to the sub-units of the Civil Service, namely the departments and agencies where the civil servants are employed. The last two components of case study research design which represent the data analysis steps have been the least well developed, namely linking data to propositions and the criteria for interpreting the findings (Yin, 1994, p.25). Whilst it is

not proposed to enter into a discussion about research findings of this case study now, the logic behind matching data to propositions and interpreting findings from the Civil Service experience of linking training strategy to organisational strategy can and will be explained. In fact, on reflection, the process of undertaking this task as part of the design process was particularly helpful in focusing attention on the key aspects of the research.

Accepting that as Yin says, "the current state of the art does not provide detailed guidance" (p.26), the researcher has used Yin's pattern-matching logic whereby comparison is made between a research based pattern and a predicted pattern in order to analyse case study evidence which Yin describes as "one of the most desirable strategies" (p.106). Based on the hypothesis, certain predictions have been made by the researcher on how training strategy will link to organisational strategy in departments and agencies if organisational objectives are going to be achieved. The data sources have provided empirical evidence on the pattern of linkages between organisational strategy and training strategy in the Civil Service thereby enabling the researcher to make a judgement about how complementary and compatible these factors are with one another. This analytic tactic of pattern matching is one way of addressing the problem of internal validity in case study research (Yin, 1994, p.35). The data analysis process will be described in more detail in the next section on collecting and analysing case study evidence, and each of chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 will look at the research findings for organisational strategy, training strategy and linking mechanisms.

COLLECTING AND ANALYSING CASE STUDY EVIDENCE

PRINCIPLES OF DATA COLLECTION

"The data collection process for case studies is more complex than the processes used in other research strategies" (Yin, 1994, p.100). Case study data is collected from people and institutions within their real life contexts, resulting in a need for explicit and well-planned field procedures, and a clarity about the levels of questions being covered by the case study (Yin, 1994 p.68-70). In single case studies, such as this one, a distinction needs to be made between level one questions, which are the questions asked of specific interviewees, and level two questions which are the questions asked of the individual case. In this research project the case is about an organisation, namely the Civil Service (level two) but the data collection relies heavily on information from level one (individuals).

The process of selecting those people who will be interviewed in case studies is not based on a statistical sample but instead takes into account criteria associated with "the need to cover all relevant viewpoints, identifying who possesses special knowledge, and determining how to gain access" (Kitay and Callus, 1998, p.109). In this case study a decision was made to select middle managers as a primary information source, mainly because these grades of civil servants are considered to have a key role in delivering organisational objectives, and they comprise most of the students attending training courses run in the Management Development Group at the Civil Service College. Their views therefore are seen as important, and the focus of the enquiry is their training and development needs combined with personal perceptions of how the organisation has linked organisational strategy and training strategy. The logic behind this approach is that their training and development needs will arise from the organisational strategy and

feed into the training strategy. Identifying their views of training and development issues in their own departments and agencies provides valuable insights into organisational strategy and training strategy in the Civil Service. Data from interviews has been combined with other evidence about the organisation in order to reach conclusions from the case study. These conclusions relate to the research questions described earlier in this chapter. Confusion can occur about the levels of questions where the unit of analysis for the case study is different from the unit of analysis for the data collection source (Yin, 1994, p.72). One of the challenges for the researcher in case study data collection is interpreting information as it is being collected, and recognising contradictions in evidence thereby necessitating the need for additional evidence (Yin, 1994, p.58).

Three recognised principles of quality control in the data collection process have been adopted in this case study (Yin, 1994, p.90-100). Firstly, multiple sources of evidence have been used as will be described in the next sub-section and these have corroborated facts obtained concerning the linkages between organisational strategy and training strategy in the Civil Service thereby increasing the construct validity of the case study. Second and thirdly, the data collected has been organised into manual files and some of it input onto a computer spreadsheet, and a chain of evidence has been maintained in order to increase the reliability of the information. Again this process will be explained in the following description of the evidence sources, and the next five chapters of this thesis will makes specific reference to the relevant parts of the case study database. Despite the comments by some academics that "case study research remains more of an art than a science" (Kitay and Callus, 1998, p.103), the four tests of construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability can be applied to case study designs

(Yin, 1994, p.32-38). It will be for the reader to decide whether these tests have been passed in this case study.

SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

Four main sources of evidence have been used in this case study and will be described separately in this sub-section and labelled alphabetically from (a) to (d). However, in order to make the point that evidence is cumulative in addition to having been collected and analysed chronologically, figure 2.1 represents diagramatically the sequence and the process that has been followed in this case study methodology.

Fig. 2.1 Research methodology: building up multiple sources of evidence

Although the focus groups and follow-up interviews are shown separately in figure 2.1 these are often referred to collectively as interviews (Yin, 1994, p.78). The interview is in fact one of the most widely used tools of data collection in qualitative research (Punch, 1998, p.174). This case study has used a combination of individual and group interviews: the former as follow-up interviews to the survey questionnaire, and the

latter as focus groups to inform the questions asked in the survey. We will now turn our attention more specifically to these focus groups.

a. Focus Groups

The focus group was originally a term applied to a particular type of group interview used in marketing where the role of the researcher changes to one of a facilitator rather than interviewer, with the group interaction directed by questions and topics supplied by the researcher, who monitors and records that interaction (Punch, 1998, p.177). This interaction can bring out aspects of a situation which might otherwise be missed so focus groups can make an important research contribution, and they are increasingly being used in conjunction with surveys. They can also be used to help design survey questionnaires (Strauss and Whitfield, 1998, p.25). This was how focus groups were used here.

Two focus groups were held in May and June 1997, in London and Leeds respectively, and they were facilitated by the researcher. A number of participants were invited to attend from a cross section of Civil Service departments and agencies. A table giving details of the departments and agencies represented at each focus group meeting is shown at Appendix I.

In an effort to encourage attendance the focus groups were arranged over the lunch period, and a buffet lunch was provided. Travelling expenses were reimbursed if requested. The researcher made telephone contact with the participants who were a selection of students working in the middle management grades who had previously attended one or more of her training events at the Civil Service College. This personal

contact encouraged a positive response from those invited to attend, and the personal knowledge of the researcher about the students ensured that invitations were given to those people who were most likely to contribute to the discussions. The selection process was in line with the criteria outlined by Kitay and Callus (1998, p.109) which has already been described. All telephone contacts were followed by a formal letter of invitation explaining the purpose of the meeting and the domestic arrangements. The focus groups were a mixture of male and female civil servants, working in a range of Civil Service grades from Higher Executive Officer, to Senior Executive Officer and Level 7 equivalents, in a combination of policy and operational posts.

The overall objective of the focus groups was to determine how Civil Service reforms have impacted on the jobs of middle managers, and the effect of these changes on their training and development needs. In exploring these issues, the researcher wanted to elicit the perceptions of participants concerning organisational change and the effect on middle management jobs, the key skills and attitudes they felt are required in the New Civil Service, the training and development opportunities that are available, and how they believed training strategy is linking to organisational strategy in their own department or agency. Full details of the programme for the focus groups is given at Appendix II.

A tape recording of the discussions was made at each of the focus groups and the original tapes and paper transcripts are held in the research database, together with a copy of the management report that was prepared for the researcher's line manager. Whilst the purpose of this chapter describing the case study methodology is not intended to examine research findings, the focus groups were particularly helpful in

refining the research objectives and designing the survey questionnaire. An important finding from the focus groups was that participants were as much concerned with the reduced job security and lack of promotion opportunities brought about by organisational change in the Civil Service, as they were about the managerial pressures of their jobs associated with higher workloads and more people responsibilities. A preconception of the researcher was that there might be ethical dilemmas facing civil servants due to the increased commercial focus of the Civil Service but these concerns were not expressed by the participants. As a result of these key findings, a decision was made not to probe the ethical issues in the questionnaire but to include instead a series of questions concerning career management.

b. Survey Questionnaire

One of the definitions of the word "survey" is that it describes any research which collects quantitative or qualitative data from a sample of people (Punch, 1998, p.76), and this case study has used what Punch defines as a descriptive survey whose purpose is to use simple proportions and percentages to describe a sample of people's responses to various questions. One of the features of surveys is that there is a link between the sample and the population with the sample responses used to make generalisations about the larger group (Hartley and Barling, 1998, p.158). This sub-section will now go on to describe the sampling methods adopted, the calculation of the sample size, the development and administration of the survey questionnaire, and the analysis of the survey data. For ease of reference these points will be numbered (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv) respectively.

(i) Sampling Methods

Although there are no general descriptions of sampling in case study research, there is a clear requirement in all qualitative sampling strategies that the sample must fit in with the other elements of the study (Punch, 1998, p.194). In the Civil Service case study middle managers had already been selected as the sample group to interview about their training and development needs. Within this group of civil servants, a stratified sample was selected for the case study survey. This allows "fair representation to the various 'layers' or sub-groups within a population" (Morris, 1989, p.42). The population in this sample is the total number of middle managers working in the Civil Service. At the time of the survey questionnaire in November 1997 the most recently published C*ivil Service Statistics* (Cabinet Office, 1996, p.40) listed the full-time equivalent numbers of managers working at Level 7, Senior Executive Officer (SEO) and Higher Executive Officer (HEO) level as 17,620; 23,490; and 73,050 respectively giving a total number of 114,160 civil servants working in what is generally recognised as the middle management grades. Applying percentages to these figures, 15% of middle managers were working at Level 7; 21% at SEO level; and 64% at HEO level. This compares with a total number of 458,370 non-industrial permanent civil servants working in the Civil Service at 1 April, 1996 (Cabinet Office, 1996, p.40). The percentages of middle managers working at Level 7, SEO and HEO levels form the basis for the stratified sample for the survey questionnaire.

(ii) Sample Size

Given the large numbers of middle managers working in the Civil Service at 1 April 1996, finding the right sample size for the survey is a key issue in the case study methodology. The logic behind quantitative sampling is based on the key concept of

representativeness with the probability sampling used to achieve this mainly based on random selection (Punch, 1998, p.105). Sampling costs time and money so the determination of the sample size that is needed to estimate the population percentage to some predetermined degree of accuracy is very important (Morris, 1989, p.194). The statistical calculations that have been employed in order to arrive at the sample size for the survey questionnaire are outlined in detail in Appendix III. On the basis of an expected 40% questionnaire return rate, a sample size of 1000 middle managers was calculated, and this was stratified on the basis described in (i) above with 150 (15%) questionnaires sent to Level 7 managers, 210 (21%) to SEO grades and 640 (64%) to managers working as HEOs. The sub-groups of managers were pre-selected on the basis of computer generated lists of students who had attended Management Development Group courses at the Civil Service College during the twelve month period ended October 1997, and random selections of people to be included in the sample made from numbered items on the lists. The records of the process adopted are contained in a file in the research database.

(iii) Development and Administration of Survey Questionnaire

"A well-designed questionnaire rather than a haphazard series of questions can make a great deal of difference to the accuracy of the data we collect, as well as simplifying the task of analysing responses" (Morris, 1989, p.45). A copy of the case study survey questionnaire is shown at Appendix IV. The questionnaire asks for personal information, job information, employment history and training and development needs. Although a number of the questions ask for boxed responses, some are open questions. Whilst some general trends about job changes and training and development needs were identified from the focus groups findings and helped with question development and

lines of enquiry, some of the questions were deliberately left open for codifying during data analysis. The questionnaire was sent by post to the work address of the people included in the sample, with a freepost address for the return of the completed questionnaire, and accompanied by a personally addressed computer generated letter which offered entry into a prize draw for a £20 book token as an incentive for people to complete and return the questionnaire.

A total of 257 questionnaires were returned as a result of this letter, a 25.7% response rate, and this was later increased to 38.2% (382 completed questionnaires) by sending a follow-up letter and second questionnaire to all non-respondents. The size of the sample for data analysis is in line with the calculation of required sample size as described in Appendix III.

(iv) Analysis of Survey Data

The survey data has been analysed on a variable-by-variable basis which is in line with current practice (Punch, 1998, p.128). The case study survey questionnaire, whilst containing some boxed replies, did not use predetermined codes for data analysis purposes and instead boxed questions were subsequently coded. The data from the case study survey was input onto a computer database, namely a microsoft excel spreadsheet comprising five separate files. Examples of data entries on a selection of files is given at Appendix V. The task of inputting the data onto the spreadsheets was a time consuming process, taking approximately 10 minutes per entry. The survey data has been analysed by responses to questions and summary sheets and tables prepared containing the answers to open questions. The findings from the data analysis are included in each of the chapters 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 on organisational strategy, training

strategy, linking mechanisms and conclusions but figures 2.2; 2.3; 2.4; 2.5; 2.6; 2.7; 2.8 and 2.9 that follow each contain details of the personal and job related information of respondents. This data is displayed graphically using the software facilities available on the excel programme and all findings are based on percentage figures.

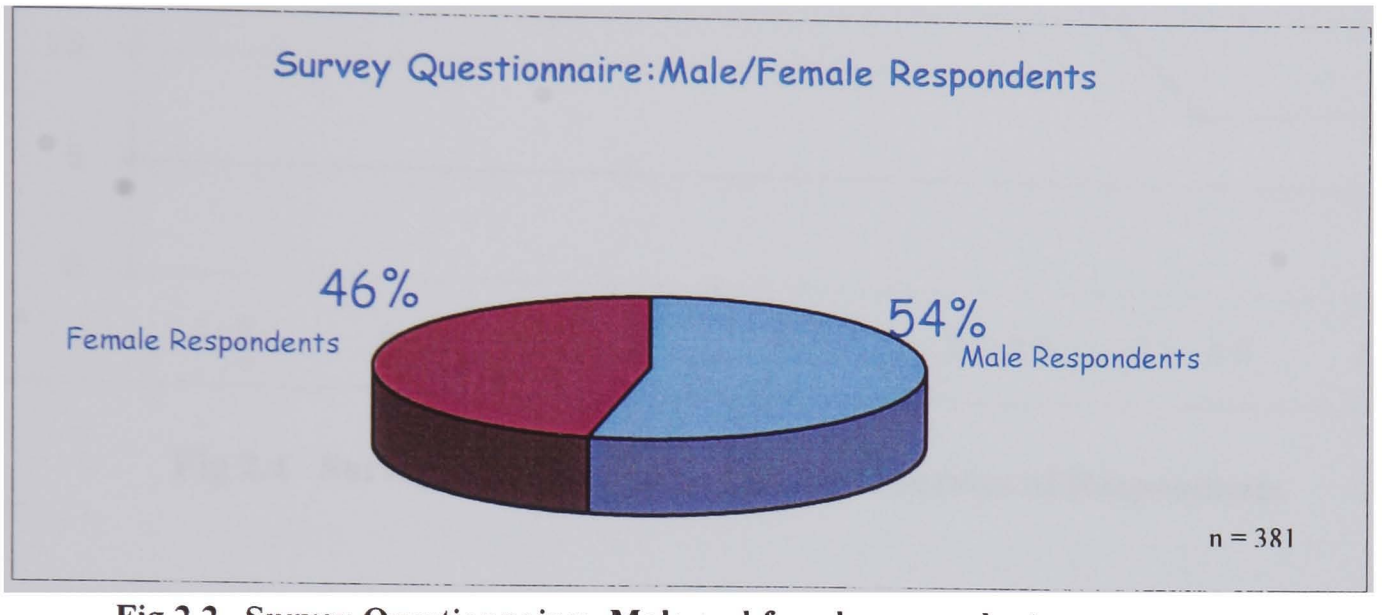


Fig 2.2 Survey Questionnaire: Male and female respondents

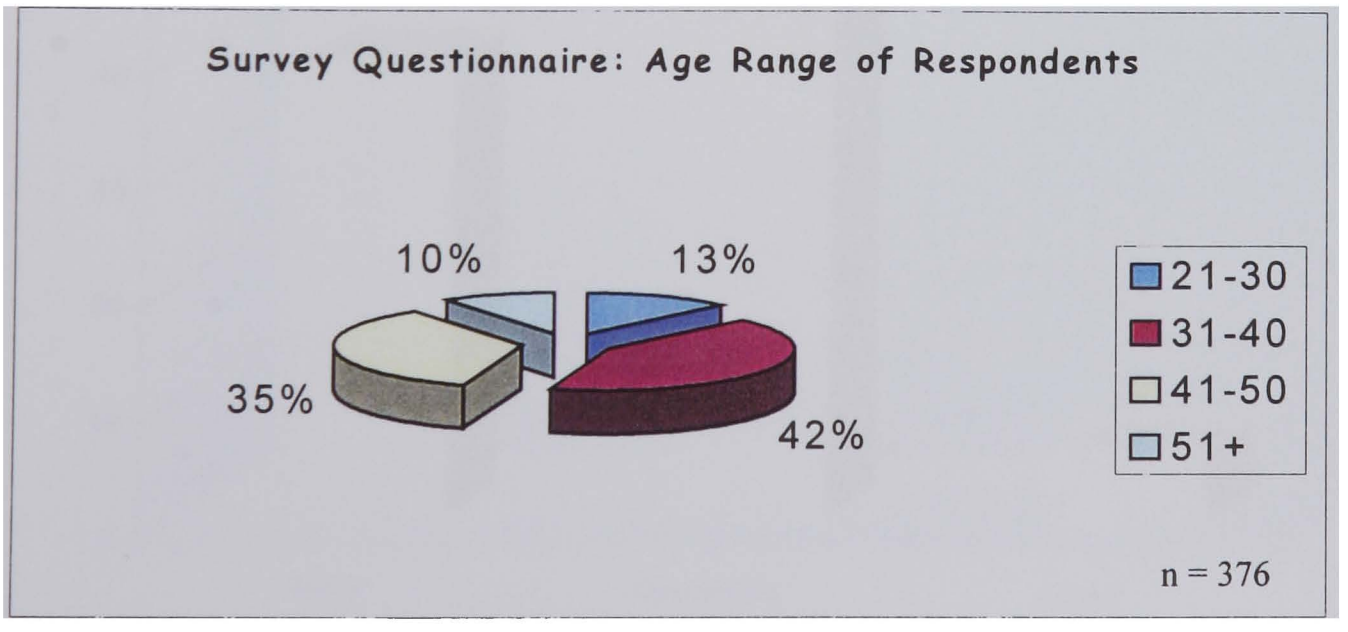


Fig 2.3 Survey Questionnaire: Age range of respondents

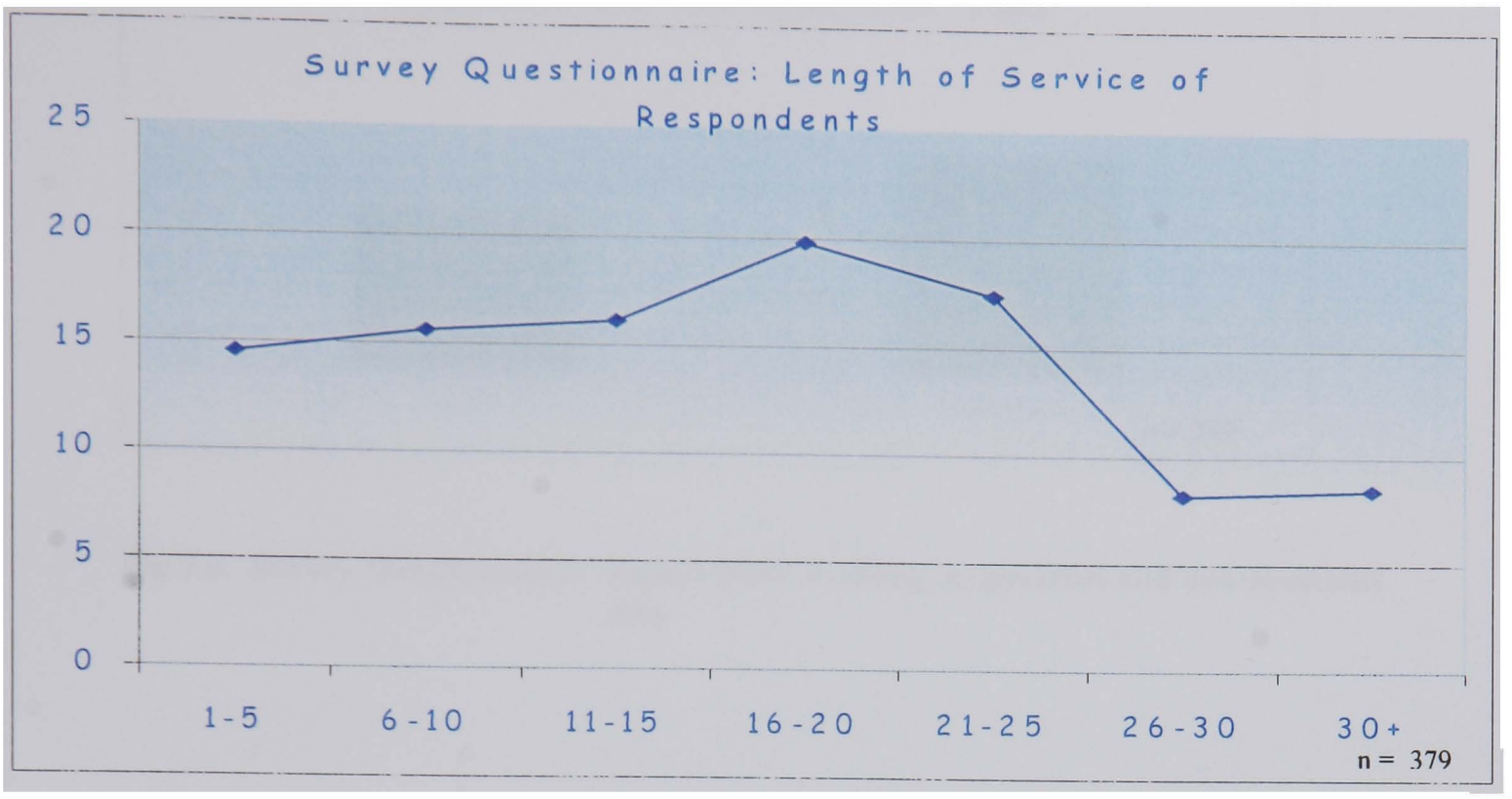


Fig 2.4 Survey Questionnaire: Length of Service of Respondents

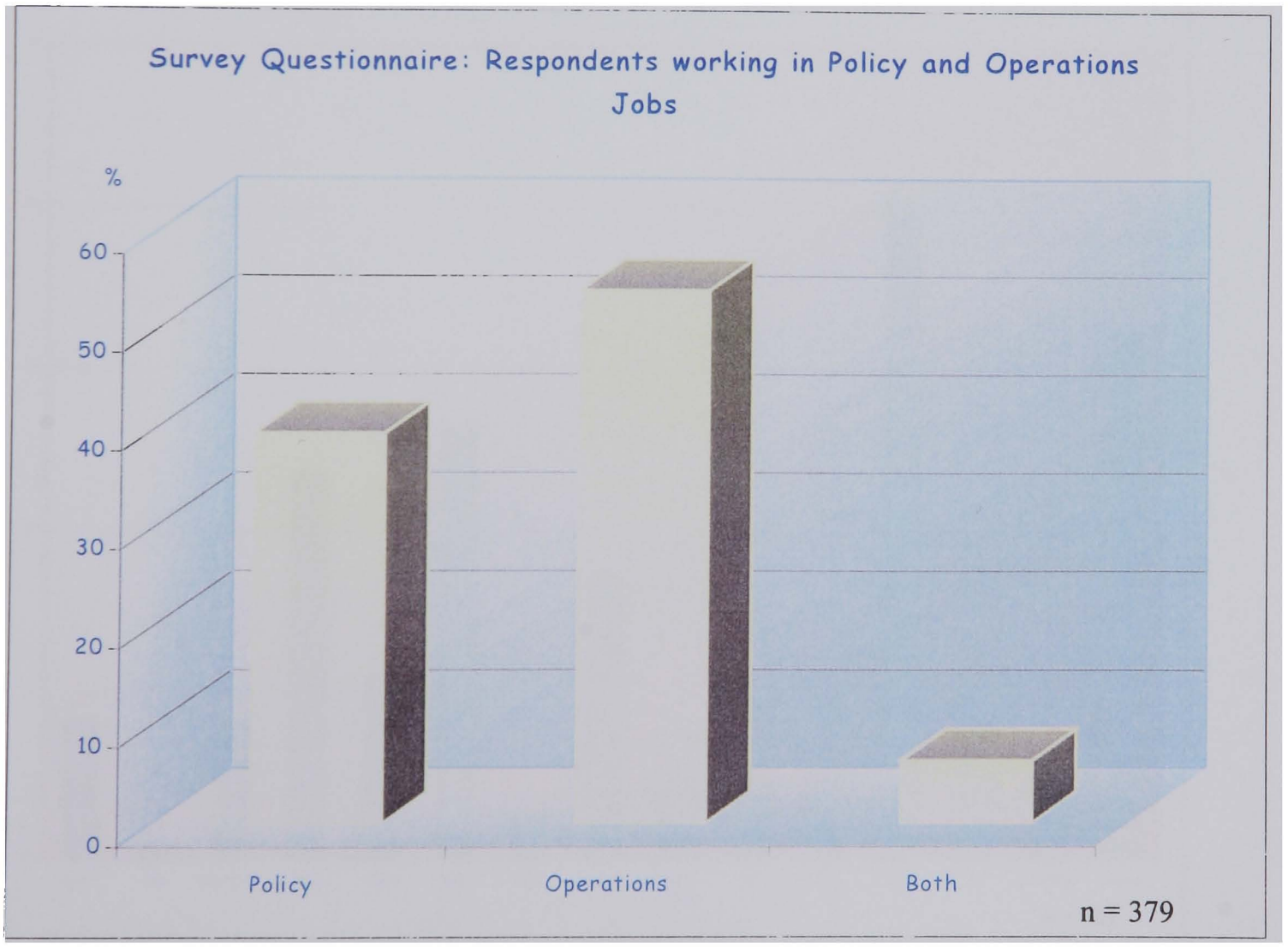


Fig 2.5 Survey Questionnaire: Respondents Working in Policy and Operations Jobs

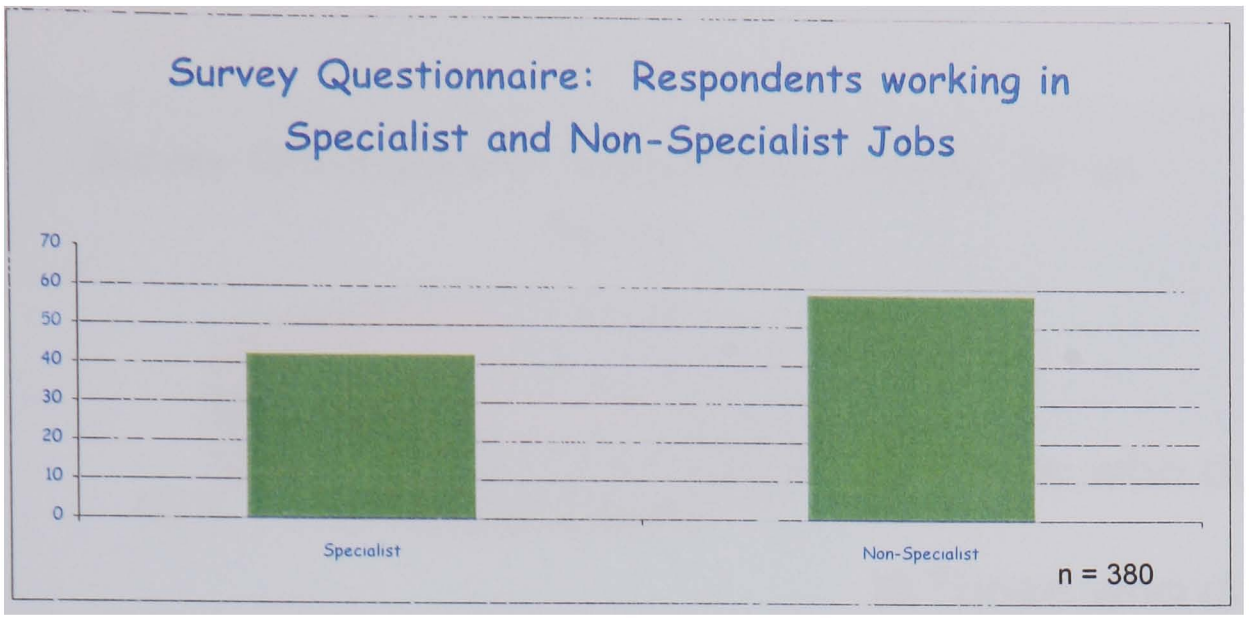


Fig 2.6. Survey Questionnaire: Respondents working in specialist and non-specialist jobs

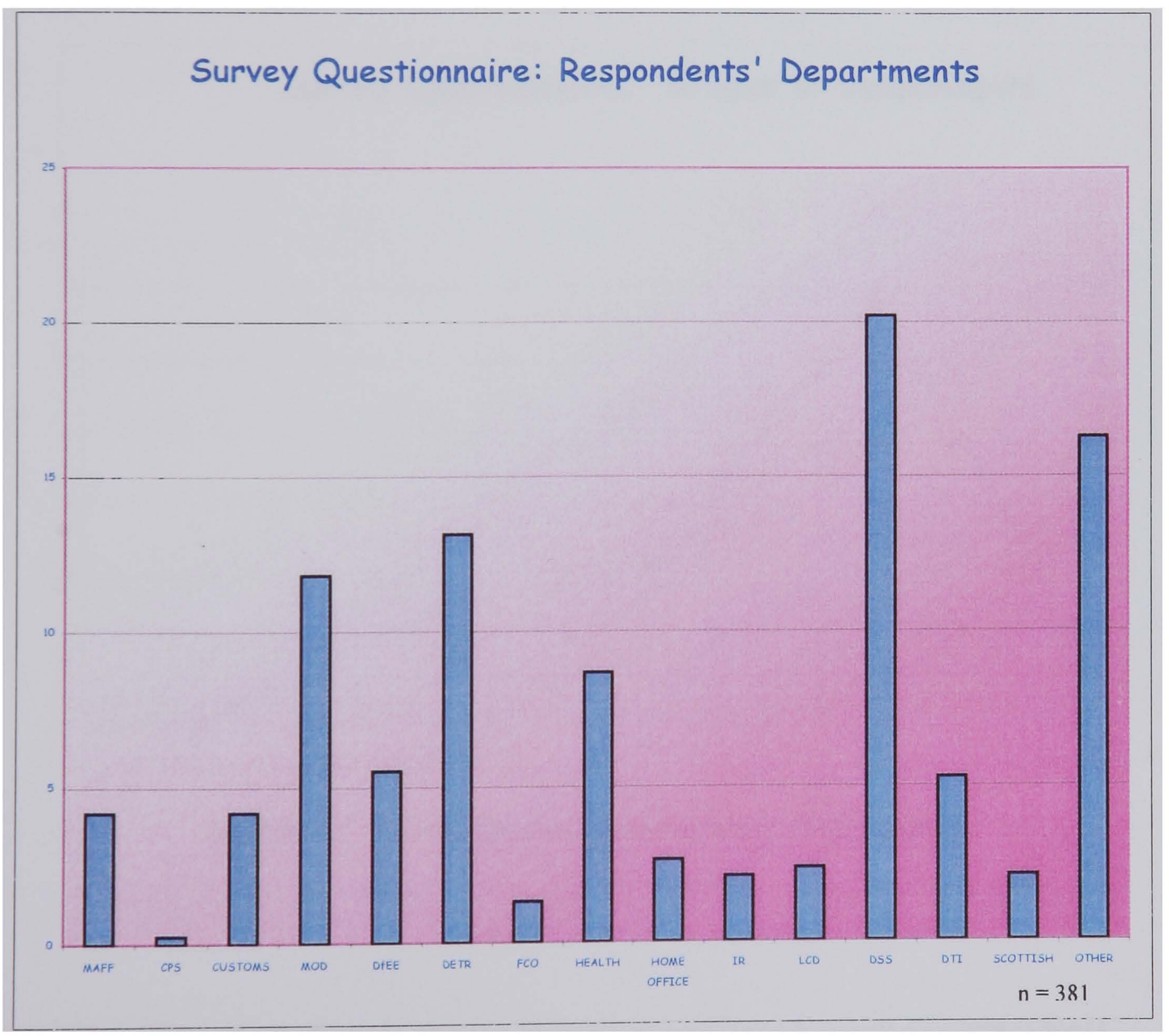


Fig 2.7 Survey Questionnaire: respondents' departments

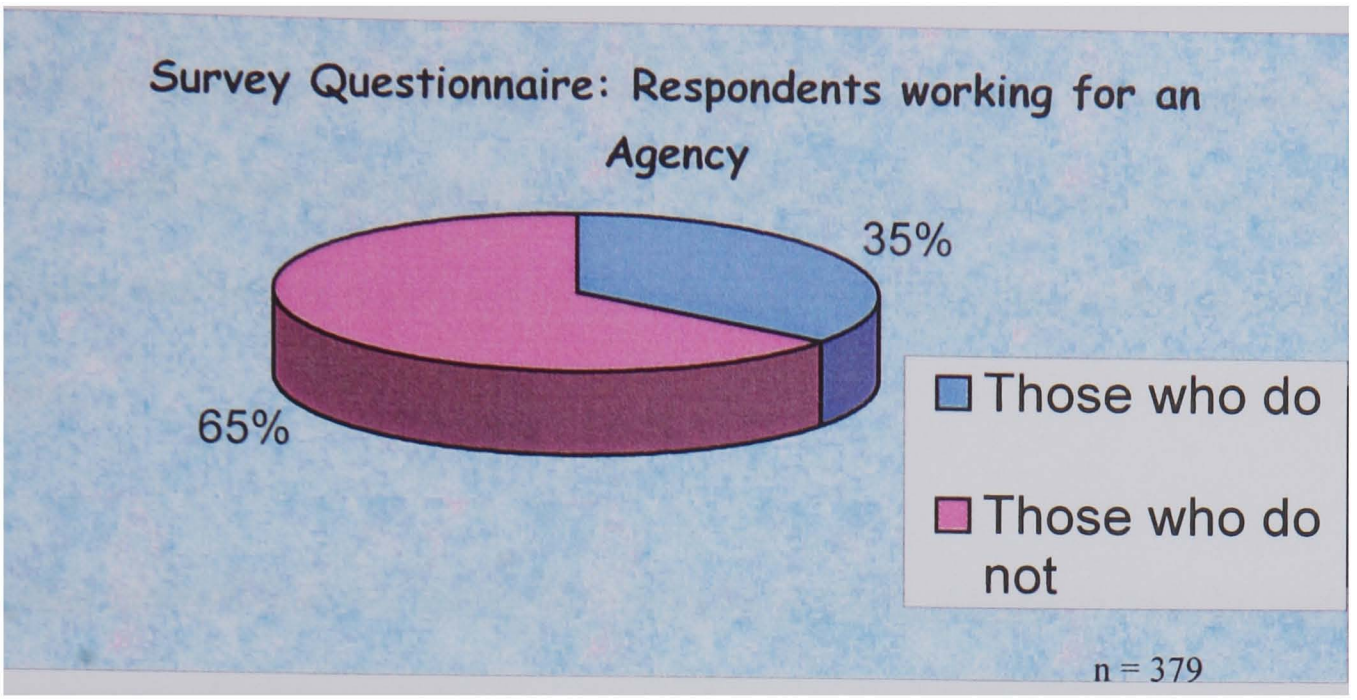


Fig. 2.8 Survey Questionnaire: Respondents working for an Agency

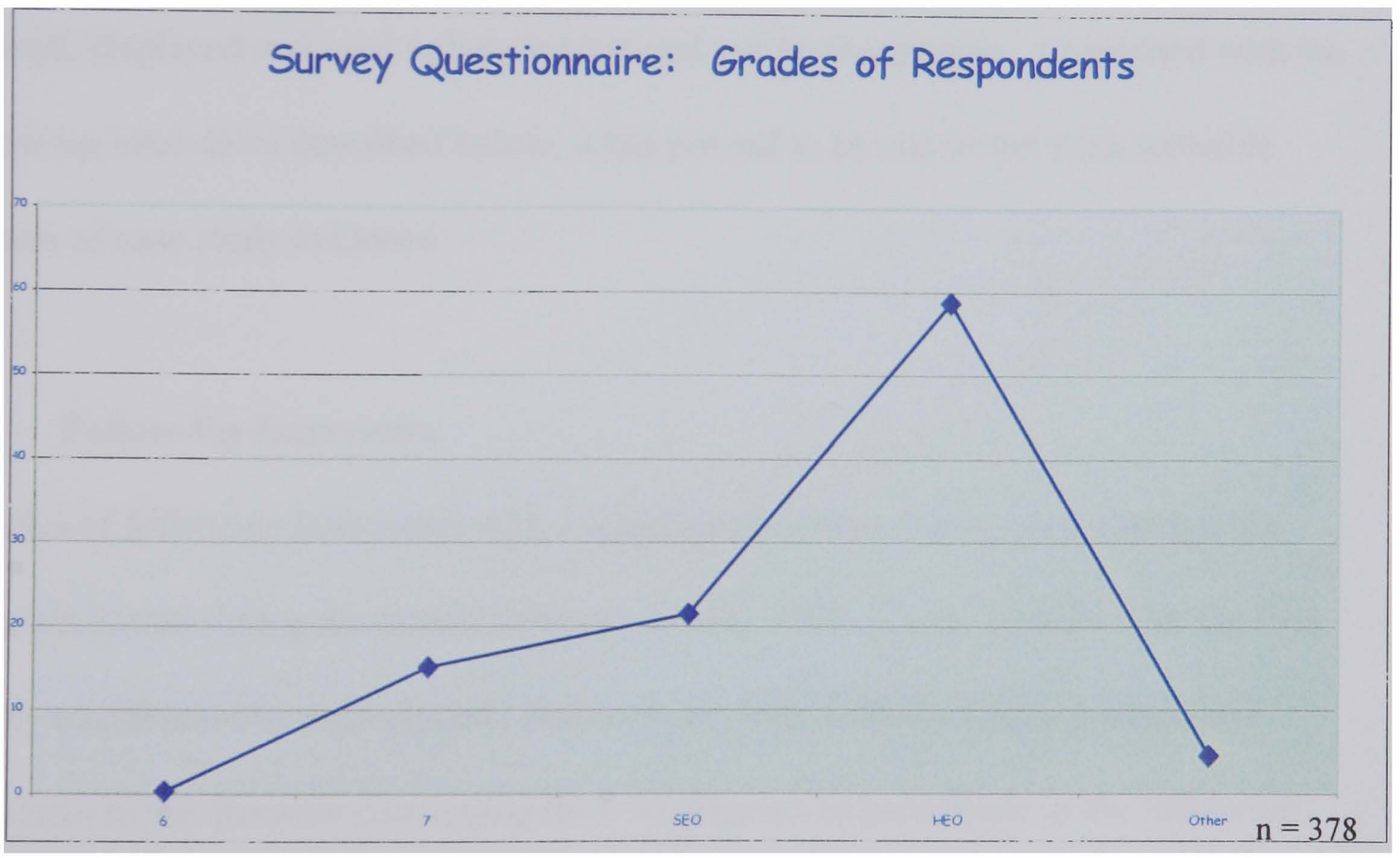


Fig 2.9 Survey Questionnaire: Grades of Respondents

Taken together, these figures show a mature, experienced group of respondents comprising more men than women, working in operations more than in policy jobs, in a

variety of departments. A minority of respondents work for an executive agency. On their own understanding of what constitutes specialist work, more respondents consider themselves non-specialists than specialists. The stratified nature of the sample is reflected in the grades of respondents. Given the nature of the research questions it is reassuring that there is such a wide diversity of backgrounds represented in the survey sample.

The data analysis from the survey questionnaire has been integrated with the analysis of other sources of evidence from the case study research project. "There is no single right way to do qualitative data analysis – no single methodological framework" (Punch, 1998, p.199). In this case study the data from the survey questionnaire has been reduced, displayed and used to help inform and verify conclusions. Combined with the follow-up interviews described below, it has proved to be one of the most valuable sources of case study evidence.

c. Follow-Up Interviews

A series of follow-up interviews with a selection of twenty five survey respondents were conducted during the period February to May 1999, fifteen months after the first survey questionnaires were posted. Interviewees were initially selected from their responses to the question concerning their willingness to participate in the follow-up survey, and other answers they had provided on the questionnaire. As interviews were arranged to take place in the interviewee's work environment, further selection criteria included the name and location of their employing department or agency, and their grade and type of job. The sampling method adopted was what Morris (1989, p.43) describes as "quota sampling" whereby the "quota" in question is the twenty five civil

servants comprising twenty respondents and five of their line managers. Morris states that, "the advantage of this method to the interviewer is that, while the correct proportions of different subgroups in the population are preserved, she can choose anyone who satisfies the criteria of a particular subgroup as her victim". Within the "quota" of twenty respondents, the number of Level 7, SEO and HEO managers to be interviewed was calculated on the same basis as the stratified sample for the survey questionnaire. It was therefore intended that 3 respondents (15%) would be working at Level 7, 4 (21%) in the SEO grade, and 13 (64%) at HEO level in a cross section of department and agencies within easy travelling distance of the Civil Service College due to the cost of transport to more distant locations. In reality, however, as a result of the time lag between questionnaire completion and follow-up interviews, this quota sampling proved difficult with a number of respondents moving jobs, some on promotion. The HEO grades therefore are marginally under-represented, and the Level 7 grades over-represented, in the sample. A schedule of the follow-up interviews is given at Appendix VI.

Interviews were arranged by telephone, and a letter confirming the interview and enclosing a list of suggested questions was subsequently sent to interviewees. Survey respondents were told that their interview would be expected to last one and one half hours, the interviews with the selection of line managers approximately one hour. The suggested questions for these semi-structured interviews are shown at Appendix VII. A tape recorder was used, with the interviewee's permission, to record parts of the interviews which helped to avoid some of the problems associated with poor recall (Yin, 1994, p.85). These recordings have provided a valuable source of evidence by way of quotations.

d. Documentary Evidence

The most important use of documents in case studies is to corroborate and increase evidence from other sources (Yin, 1994, p.81). This rich data source may come from historical or contemporary documents (Punch, 1998, p.190). Documentary evidence may be classified into primary and secondary sources, public and private documents, and those that are unsolicited and solicited (Burgess, 1995, p.123). Included in the category of primary sources in this case study are personal documents such as the training and development plans of interviewees. Materials that have already been published, such as the training plans of departments and agencies, are secondary sources. Publications like the *Civil Service Statistics* and Government White Papers are public documents because they are all readily available to the public. Other documents that the researcher has accessed within departments and agencies in connection with job appraisals, and business planning are private. All documents that have been used in the research have been unsolicited, that is produced without research in mind. One of the weaknesses of documentary evidence identified by Yin (p.80) is that access may be deliberately blocked; as a civil servant with good access to civil servants and the internal documentation of their organisations this did not prove to be a problem in this case study. Interviewees were only too willing to share their private personnel records, offering documents for examination, and providing copies on request. Also, as an employee of an agency of the Cabinet Office, and listed on the distribution records for internal communications like newsletters, the researcher has had the benefit of identifying and locating other documents such as reports that would not otherwise be easily accessible. All documentary evidence has been used in conjunction with other data in the process of triangulation which ensures that everything is checked from more than one angle (Punch, 1998, p.191).

CONCLUSION

This then concludes the section of this chapter on the collection and analysis of case study evidence. The researcher has taken rigorous steps to ensure that the methodological approach previously outlined will stand up to external examination and pass the quality tests as described by Yin (1994, p.32-38). His characteristics of what makes for an exemplary case study (p.147-152) have also been considered. As might be expected, the researcher does consider this case study to be an important piece of work because the Civil Service is a large and important public sector organisation, and one where the lessons that can be learnt from its attempts to link organisational strategy and training strategy can have a wider application to other people with an interest in strategic HRM.

CHAPTER 3

ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGY IN THE CIVIL SERVICE

THE NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

WHAT IS "NEW" IN THE CIVIL SERVICE?

The title of this thesis contains the word "new" to describe the Civil Service as a way of indicating that the organisation has undergone fundamental changes in recent years. The purpose of this chapter is to answer the specific research question, "What is the organisational strategy of the Civil Service?" by focusing on the changes that have taken place, rather than seeking to explore the meaning of strategy in this context. The researcher accepts that strategy is a "contested and imperfectable practice" (Whittington, 1993, p.1) and that developing this subject would justify a thesis in its own right, as Whittington's book so ably demonstrates. Instead, this first section will examine what is "new" in the Civil Service, and relate this evidence to the published literature on the 'new public management' (NPM). The specific nature of the Civil Service reforms will be discussed in the next section before moving to subsequent sections to look at how these changes have translated into objectives and their impact on the jobs of middle managers working in departments and agencies. It is acknowledged that strategy continues to evolve with Government policy and new initiatives and that the research findings provide a snapshot of how strategy is viewed by middle managers at a moment in time. It is further accepted that since the survey evidence was collected, and the follow-up interviews were conducted, there have been other changes that will have an impact on the jobs of middle managers. This is to some extent unavoidable in case studies such as this one, but the implications for the next

chapters on training strategy and linking mechanisms will be discussed in the last section.

THE MEANING OF NPM

Civil Service changes that have occurred since the 1980s have been linked together in the literature and termed new public management which has been used to refer to international trends in public administration (The Stationery Office, 1998, p.34). The term itself has been described as controversial with its use "mainly as a handy shorthand, a summary description of a way of reorganising public sector bodies to bring their management, reporting, and accounting approaches closer to (a particular perception of) business methods" (Dunleavy and Hood, 1994, p.9). In a previous article Hood (1991, p.4-5) summarises seven overlapping elements of NPM which are based on the beliefs that this type of public administration will require:

- "hands-on professional management in the public sector
- explicit standards and measures of performance
- greater emphasis on output controls
- shift to disaggregation of units in the public sector
- shift to greater competition in the public sector
- stress on private sector styles of management practice
- and stress on greater discipline and parsimony in resource use".

Underpinning these beliefs is the view that "management in the private sector is superior to that in the public sector" (Wilson and Doig, 1996, p.53). NPM's claim to

success lies primarily in "cutting costs and doing more for less as a result of better-quality management and different structural design" (Hood, 1991, p.15). Hood's (1991) point that there is little evidence to substantiate this claim to success has subsequently been supported by the premise that the NPM reforms do indeed need to be evaluated (Broadbent and Laughlin, 1997). Broadbent and Laughlin advocate the Comptroller and Auditor General and the National Audit Office moving beyond value for money audits based on economy ("spending less") and limited efficiency ("spending well") and effectiveness ("spending wisely") studies to more open-ended evaluations (p.497).

The academic literature which emphasises the emergence of the NPM has had these ideas popularised in the book on *Reinventing Government* (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992). This influential publication draws on Osborne and Gaebler's research in the American public sector to propose that more entrepreneurial, catalytic, mission driven organisations are emerging in the USA which are built around the principles of competition, empowerment and customer choice, with a focus on problem prevention and results, decentralised authority and market mechanisms (p.19-20). These types of organisations, it is argued, are necessary if they are going to operate successfully in turbulent international environments where change is continuous, customers are demanding and societies are information rich (p.15). The issue that Osborne and Gaebler addressed was one of how government should operate rather than how much government there should be (Painter, 1994, p.243).

The major themes of *Reinventing Government* can be seen to correspond with many of the management initiatives in the UK government (Butler, 1994). A full analysis of these initiatives will wait until the next section of this chapter which deals in depth with

Civil Service reform but Butler (1994, p.264) (at that time Secretary of the Cabinet and Head of the Home Civil Service) states:

> "When Ted Gaebler visited the UK in December 1992, he was sufficiently surprised by the extent to which we had been applying the same approach that he wondered whether we had somehow plagiarised the manuscript. We had not. These ideas had progressively been developed in Britain over the previous decade".

Given Butler's comments, as an insight into organisational strategy in the Civil Service the book is useful, but a major weakness of the work is that although it describes US public sector success stories it does not explain them (Jordan, 1994, p.279). As Jordan says, "the major objection to Osborne and Gaebler is that it is not 'real world' enough to deal with the problems of practice". Another criticism is that *Reinventing Government* (and the NPM literature) has failed to highlight the fact that transformations in public services management are crucially dependent upon innovations in information communication (Bellamy and Taylor, 1994; Muid, 1994). Bellamy and Taylor (p.61) make the point that sophisticated information systems are required to support the high levels of combined managerial autonomy and accountability and customer orientation implicit in NPM, and they call for a strategic framework for information management in government. It is interesting to note that a Central IT Unit now exists in the Cabinet Office charged with assisting Ministers to develop the government's inter-departmental strategy for using information technology to improve the efficiency of government business, and to improve the efficiency and quality of services delivered to business and the citizen.

CIVIL SERVICE REFORM

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Whilst the NPM and Reinventing Government doctrines provide insights into the changes that have taken place in the public sector, separating out the Civil Service from the wider public service is essential to properly describe the organisational strategy. The starting point for any historical narrative of Civil Service reform has to go back more than 30 years to the Fulton Report of 1968. A committee chaired by Lord Fulton was appointed in February 1966 to "examine the structure, recruitment and management, including training, of the Home Civil Service, and to make recommendations" (HMSO, 1968, p.2). This report therefore encapsulates both the proposed organisational strategy and the HRM strategy for the Civil Service at that time, linked together in a series of documents. The committee reported that:

> "The Home Civil Service today is still fundamentally the product of the nineteenth-century philosophy of the Northcote-Trevelyan Report. The tasks it faces are those of the second half of the twentieth century. This is what we have found; it is what we seek to remedy" (p.9).

The philosophy to which the committee referred was a career Civil Service, dominated by the tradition of recruiting the graduate "all-rounder" as the ruling administrator, supported by non-graduates to do the executive and clerical work, and by specialists in some departments. The committee was not only critical of this idea of the amateur civil servant but also of the proliferation of job classes which inhibited horizontal and vertical movements within and between departments; the restriction of responsibilities, authority and opportunities for specialists; the absence of skilled managers; the lack of

contact between the Civil Service and the rest of the community; and inadequate personnel management and career planning for civil servants (p.11-13). It is interesting to reflect that some of the messages contained in a report written in the 1960's should subsequently reappear in White Papers and other policy documents published in the 1980's and 1990's.

To rectify the identified criticisms the Fulton Report (p.104-106) proposed the establishment of a new Civil Service Department under the control of the Prime Minister and headed up by a Permanent Secretary who would be designated Head of the Home Civil Service. This department was to take over the functions of the Pay and Management Group of the Treasury and absorb the Civil Service Commission. In addition the report recommended that:

- all job classes should be abolished and replaced by a single, unified grading structure determined by job evaluation
- the Civil Service should develop greater professionalism among its specialists and administrators
- recruitment procedures to be speeded up with employing departments taking a larger role in the process
- a Civil Service College to be established offering training courses in administration and management
- more resources devoted to career management with changes in promotion procedures

- greater mobility between the Civil Service and other employers involving fixed period appointments and short-term staff interchanges

- the clear allocation of responsibility and authority to accountable units in departments with defined objectives

- the establishment of management services units

- planning units to be set up headed by a Senior Policy Adviser

- and the employment of experts to assist Ministers to discharge their duties effectively.

The committee also identified other subjects for further investigation including:

> "The desirability of hiving off activities to non-departmental organisations; ways and means of getting rid of unnecessary secrecy both in policy-making and in administration; the new pattern of joint consultation that will be appropriate for the Civil Service in the light of the Government's decisions on our report; and methods of making recruitment procedures as speedy and objective as possible".

In all Fulton came up with twenty-two recommendations. They aroused controversy but have become "something of a sacred text in the history of the British Civil Service" (Hennessy, 1989, p.195). Hennessy goes on to say (p.203), "a debate of almost theological proportions has raged about Fulton since its publication a generation ago". He adds, "the swiftest and heaviest flak Fulton encountered in terms of public reaction stemmed from the report's description of the administrators as 'amateurs'" (p.205). It is not difficult to imagine that this criticism would not be readily accepted by senior

civil servants charged with implementing the recommendations. The impact of the Fulton Report was, however, very far reaching and a lot of the changes that have taken place in the Civil Service subsequently have their origins in Fulton's recommendations (The Stationery Office, 1998, p.19). The immediate impact of the Report was that the new Civil Service Department (CSD) was established within four months of Fulton reporting, and the Civil Service College (CSC) within two years. The Fulton Committee's idea was that the CSD would be responsible for implementing the other recommendations and although this happened in the early years following the report with the reform of the job class system and the introduction of pilot schemes concerned with accountable management, the CSD was finally abolished in 1981 (The Stationery Office, 1998, p.19-25). The CSC, however, still remains the main external supplier of training for civil servants and "plays a crucial role in delivering key parts of the vision and strategy of the Centre for Management and Policy Studies" (Civil Service College, 2000, p.ii). But for all the progress that was made the Fulton Report was "only half-heartedly implemented and not acknowledged as an input into the more determined drive for improved management in the 1980s" (Hennessy, 1989, p.206). Hennessy concludes, "the Fulton legacy, then, is mixed, but time is changing the balance between lost and found Fulton reforms" (p.208). The next sub-section of this chapter will describe the major Civil Service reforms under the Conservative Government and their relationship to the Fulton report recommendations will become more apparent.

THE CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES 1979-1997

The Conservative Government came to power with an election pledge to cut overall civil service numbers and to 'de-privilege' the Service (McDonald, 1992, p.2). Radical reform of the civil service was the continuing policy of Mrs Thatcher's Government. A detailed analysis of the organisational strategy for the Civil Service during these years is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, to make the links with the Fulton Report, this sub-section will focus on six main initiatives that took place during the period under the Conservative Government, namely the Rayner Scrutinies, the Financial Management Initiative, the 'Next Steps' agencies, the Citizen's Charter, and the *Competing for Quality* and *Continuity and Change* White Papers. These initiatives are numbered one to six respectively in the discussion that follows; four are exclusively Civil Service reforms, the other two relate to the public service generally and encompass the wider public sector. A seventh and final category covers some of the other most important reforms during the period. The major themes underlying these initiatives will be explored in more detail in the last subsection, drawing on the views of Butler (1994) and with a first take from middle managers about how the reforms are working on the ground, and how far the Civil Service changes mirror those inherent in the *Reinventing Government* doctrines.

i. The Rayner Scrutinies

Mrs Thatcher appointed Sir Derek Rayner, now Lord Rayner, "to advise the Government on eliminating waste and reducing bureaucracy in the Civil Service" (McDonald, 1992, p.3). These efficiency scrutinies as they became known were aimed

at improving effectiveness and where possible reducing costs in particular areas, and to indicate where wider and more permanent changes were needed across the Civil Service (Cabinet Office, 1991a, p.13). The scrutiny programme got under way in November 1979 and by the end of that year over thirty projects in eighteen departments were in progress; this number grew to sixty eight scrutinies by July 1981 at which time the Government claimed that savings possibilities of around £190 million a year had been identified (McDonald, 1992, p.5). McDonald explains that the scrutinies were often designed to deal with the internal organisation of a department, particularly communications, rather than with the services provided but that the departments did not always accept the recommendations of the scrutineers (p.8-9). She concludes that although the Rayner scrutinies were useful in improving value for money, they did not lead to any structural reform of the Civil Service (p.11). Hennessy (1989, p.604) identifies the failure to improve staff working conditions in local offices as being the most important area where Sir Derek Rayner failed to make an impact. He says that the culture change to the traditional Civil Service that Rayner was aiming for did not materialise until after his departure from the Efficiency Unit in 1983 (p.605).

ii. The Financial Management Initiative

The Financial Management Initiative (FMI) was launched in the *Efficiency and Effectiveness* White Paper (HMSO, 1982). The aim of FMI was:

> "To improve management in the Civil Service by ensuring that all managers knew what their objectives were and how their achievements would be assessed; had well defined responsibilities for making the best use of their resources; and the necessary information, training and

advice to exercise their responsibilities effectively" (Cabinet Office, 1991a, p.12).

FMI was a top management system which was supposed to provide information for strategic management but not all departments were enthusiastic about adopting it (McDonald, 1992, p.15-17). Conservative Ministers too felt that they had enough to do without being "chief executives in their ministries as well as policy-makers-in-chief" (Hennessy, 1989, p.608). Hennessy goes on to say about the Ministers, "it was not what they had joined up for. Those who had survived from earlier Conservative Cabinets were baffled by the techniques, the jargon and the acronyms that enshrined them". McDonald (1992, p.19-20) sees the main thrust of FMI being to establish cost centres (showing civil servants the link between the work they authorised and its costs) but it should have led to more power, responsibility and personal accountability for line managers and she says that progress in this respect was slow with managers having only limited control over some elements of their budgets, particularly accommodation and staffing. She adds:

> "The Financial Management Initiative was intended to shift the Rayner emphasis from the costs of providing services to the development of indicators to evaluate the effectiveness of policies. The number of output and performance measures did increase with the introduction of FMI, up from 500 in 1985 to 1800 in 1987. But, on examination, many of these turn out to be manpower statistics, or the number of recipients of social security benefits, or hospital outpatients treated – information which has always been available in departments. These figures do not depend on a clear statement of the objectives

of various policies and the appropriate measures of their effectiveness; they are simply activity indicators" (p.23).

When Sir Robin Ibbs replaced Sir Derek Rayner as her Efficiency Adviser, Mrs Thatcher asked him to help Ministers use their FMI systems to set efficiency targets and bring about improvements (Hennessy, 1989, p.613). Hennessy explains (p.620) that Ibbs in turn later asked three members of his Efficiency Unit to undertake a review of the achievements of FMI and the Rayner scrutinies "to identify which obstacles stood in the way of substantial improvements in efficiency and to state what kind of explosive was needed to dynamite them". Their findings are incorporated in the following description of the third and most far reaching initiative, namely that of the introduction of the 'Next Steps' agencies.

iii. The 'Next Steps' Agencies

Sir Robin Ibbs and his small team began their fact finding exercise in November 1986 and discovered that although the main business of 95% of the Civil Service was to deliver services, operational efficiency was given lower priority among senior people than giving policy advice to Ministers (Goldsworthy, 1991, p.4). Their damming report (Efficiency Unit, 1988) showed that only little real financial and management responsibility had been devolved; that a culture of caution and error avoidance predominated in the Civil Service; and that management skills were undervalued (Hennessy, 1989, p.629). The Efficiency Unit believed that the main obstacle to further improvements in the delivery of services was that the Civil Service was governed by central controls which prevented local managers from making decisions in the best interests of their organisations and they recommended separating the executive

functions for government from the policy making role by establishing executive agencies (Goldsworthy, 1991, p.4-5). Goldsworthy explains (p.6) that an agency was defined as "a discrete area of work with a single, named individual – a Chief Executive – in charge, with personal responsibility to the Minister for day-to-day management". In this way power would be devolved concerning budgets, staffing, pay and recruitment with agencies operating within a policy and resources framework set by Ministers (McDonald, 1992, p.29).

In the same way as the Fulton Report laid down the training strategy of the Civil Service alongside the proposed organisational strategy, and the FMI involved a programme of familiarisation training for middle managers to ensure they understood the initiative and would know what to do if they became cost centre managers (McDonald, 1992, p.25), so the Efficiency Unit stressed the importance of preparing managers properly for the job of managing service delivery, both by training and by experience (Goldsworthy, 1991, p.7).

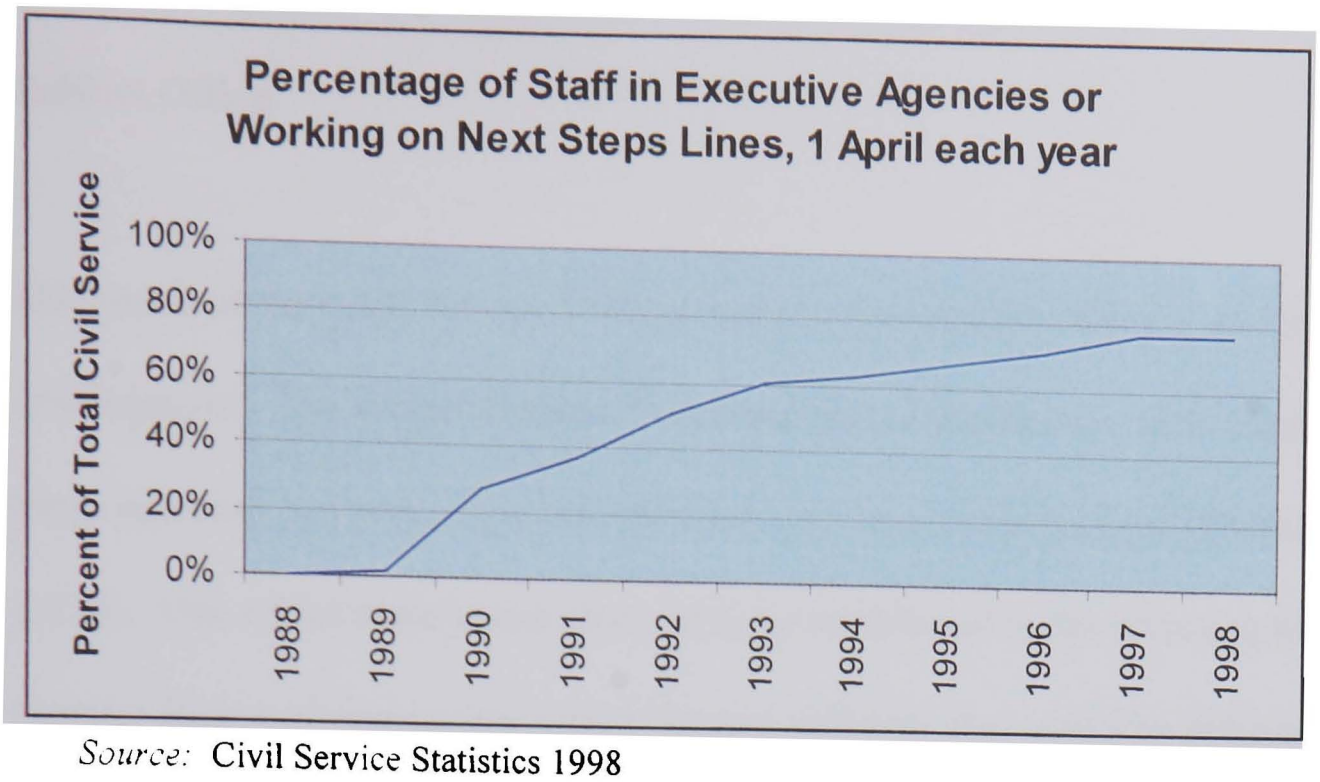
The Efficiency Unit's report, *Improving Management in Government: the Next Steps* (Efficiency Unit, 1988) was presented to the Prime Minister in the Spring of 1987 and there followed an intense period of activity in departments to prepare detailed implementation proposals for twelve initial candidates for agency status (Goldsworthy, 1991, p.8-10). The report (Efficiency Unit, 1988) said that the choice and definition of suitable agencies was for Ministers and senior civil servants to determine and explicit reference was made to the "hiving off" proposals contained in the Fulton Report (HMSO, 1968). In a statement to the House of Commons on 18 February the Prime Minister accepted the recommendations of the report and a senior Treasury official,

Peter Kemp (now Sir Peter Kemp) was appointed as Project Manager and given the status of a Permanent Secretary within the Cabinet Office to bring about the change in the Civil Service (The Stationery Office, 1998, p.27).

> "By 1990, 34 agencies had been created, employing 80,000 people and costing around £3,000 million per year to run. Each agency had been set up with a Framework Document, agreed by the responsible Minister, setting out the tasks allocated to it, its financial targets and quality of service targets. The performance of each agency was reported through the publication of annual reports" (p.27).

However, before agency status was considered by the Government the activities were examined to assess their suitability for privatisation or abolition although having launched an agency there was no guarantee of no privatisation at a later date (Goldsworthy, 1991, p.18).

The number of agencies had grown to 112 by 1 April 1998 with a further four organisations (Customs and Excise, Inland Revenue, Crown Prosecution Service and the Serious Fraud Office) operating on Next Steps lines. In total there were 355,902 permanent staff working for these organisations, 77% of the Civil Service, and a further twelve functions had been identified as candidates for agency status (Cabinet Office, 1998a, p.6). A graph showing the annual percentage increase in staff working in executive agencies or on Next Steps lines between 1988 and 1998 is shown at figure 3.1.



Source: Civil Service Statistics 1998

Fig. 3.1 Percentage of staff in executive agencies, or working on Next Steps Lines, 1 April each year

Excluding from the 1998 percentage the staff working for the Crown Prosecution Service, Customs and Excise, Inland Revenue and the Serious Fraud Office, a total of 78,000 staff, (Cabinet Office, 1998a, p.25) these figures still show a considerable difference between the 60% of civil servants working for agencies, and the 35% of agency respondents to the survey questionnaire used in the research project (see figure 2.8 in chapter 2). Question 12 on the questionnaire asked respondents how many agencies they had worked for in the departments. The total number recorded on the spreadsheet is 232 indicating that even if respondents did not work for an agency when they completed the questionnaire they may well have done so in the past. Some respondents had worked for two or three agencies. A possible explanation for the low response rate from civil servants working for agencies may relate to the training arrangements in place in agencies as compared to departments, or their unwillingness to go on training courses, or to complete a survey questionnaire. Whilst there is no data to support these explanations, the fact merits further investigation by the Civil Service College, itself one of the first agencies to be established in 1989 although its status

changed in April 2000 when it ceased as a Next Steps agency, and returned to the Cabinet Office.

This move of the Civil Service College back to the Cabinet Office is an interesting development. The establishment of what has been described as "arm's-length" Next Steps agencies can pose important dilemmas for ministerial control (Dudley, 1994, p.220). One of the main issues that had to be considered in the planning for Next Steps was the degree of managerial autonomy and authority that could be delegated to Chief Executives without eroding Ministers' accountability to Parliament (Goldsworthy, 1991, p.9). Dudley's paper (1994, p.234) looked at the relationship between ministerial control and political salience and concluded that:

> "In conditions of low political salience, the discretion given to the agency can allow greater scope for personal initiative, but at the cost of the minister becoming remote from operational management. In the case of an agency with a high political salience, a minister is much more likely to intervene in its affairs, but at the cost of undermining and confusing the executive management".

The issue of ministerial responsibility has been highlighted by difficulties experienced by Ministers and Chief Executives in the Child Support Agency and the Prison Service (Fry, 1997; Barberis, 1998). Barberis believes that the NPM has exacerbated and increased the visibility of "existing fault- lines in the system of accountability, particularly in connection with the relative spheres of responsibility for ministers and officials". He concludes that these problems are unlikely to go away (p.460). A one-

year study into the Department of Health (Day and Klein, 1997, p.1) concludes that, "the attempt to separate responsibility for policy and the management of services – the defining characteristic of the Next Steps agency model – has failed in the case of the National Health Service" and further that, "the experience of the Department of Health suggests, more generally, that the free-standing agency model may be inappropriate in the case of complex publicly funded services with high political salience". Whilst it is not suggested that the move away from agency status for the Civil Service College is prompted by the question of political salience, it is unknown whether this development will be replicated in other organisational strategy initiatives. As Day and Klein say in their paper, "the invention of the Next Steps-type agency model may therefore not mark the end of the pursuit of the holy grail of public management" (p.4).

iv. The Citizen's Charter

Unlike the other Conservative Government initiatives previously described, *The Citizen's Charter: Raising the Standard* (HMSO, 1991) was introduced by John Major as Prime Minister. The White Paper "set out the mechanics for improving choice, quality, value and accountability" with the stated aim of releasing the qualities of "talent, energy, care and commitment in our public services" (p.2). The four main themes in the White Paper of quality, choice, standards and value were to be supported by a range of mechanisms including more privatisation, wider competition, further contracting-out of services, more performance-related pay, published performance targets, comprehensive publication of information on standards achieved, more effective complaints procedures, tougher and more independent inspectorates, and better redress for the citizen when services go badly wrong (p.4-5). Addressed more to the users of public services than to citizens as such, each public service or agency was

asked to develop its own charter (Pollitt, 1994, p.9). Pollitt states that as a result it is not a single charter but a broad and developing programme. He explains that a Citizen's Charter Unit was established in the Cabinet Office with the authority to veto any draft departmental charters which did not satisfy the requirements, and a central task force set up to make sure that every public service has an appropriate complaints system. There is also a Citizen's Charter Advisory Panel which awards Charter Marks to public service organisations which have entered a competition to show measurable improvements in quality; 36 awards were made in the first round in 1992 from 300 applicants (Pollitt, 1994, p.10). More recently, the Passport Agency has had its Charter Mark withdrawn because of falling standards associated with unprecedented queues outside passport offices and a backlog in processing passport applications.

The Conservative Government's Citizen Charter initiative has subsequently been succeeded by the Labour Government's Service First programme. This *New Charter Programme* was launched in July 1998 (Cabinet Office, 1998b) and is underpinned by nine principles of public service delivery, namely that every public service should set standards of service, be open and provide full information, consult and involve, encourage access and the promotion of choice, treat all fairly, put things right when they go wrong, use resources effectively, innovate and improve, and work with other providers (p.11-16). The aim of the programme is to improve service delivery across the public sector and as such, like the Citizen's Charter, it is not purely a Civil Service reform initiative.

v. Competing for Quality

The *Competing for Quality: Buying Better Public Services* White Paper (Treasury, 1991) built on the Citizen's Charter that was published before it. It set out how the Government proposed to expand competition in the public sector and emphasised the role of public sector managers in buying services on behalf of citizens with one chapter (p.8-11) devoted specifically to central government initiatives. These initiatives included:

- Civil Service departments to be able to apply savings to benefit programmes
- departments and Executive Agencies to publish annual targets for market testing new areas of activity
- private sector studies to assist in setting targets
- new areas for competition
- acquisition of purchasing skills
- transparency of in-house costs
- streamlining procedures to cut out red tape and delay and in-house bids to be made in parallel with competitors
- legislation on technical redundancy
- new Public Competition and Purchasing Unit in the Treasury
- and Unit's Chairman also to be a member of the Citizen's Charter Panel of Advisers.

It also contained general guidance on making competition effective (p.5-7) and a summary of specific department's achievements and plans in extending competition (p.26-35).

The ideas in the White Paper about contracting out and competitive tendering in central government were not, however, new ones as the Conservative Government had encouraged this process since 1980 (Asher, 1987, p.43). Ascher points out that many departmental services, mainly cleaning and maintenance, had already been contracted out prior to 1979, and each department had contracted out numerous specialist services such as computer and management consultancy. She adds, "at a meeting in December 1982, the Cabinet agreed that departments should aim to contract out much more of their work" and in March 1985 departments were told by Treasury "to maximise opportunities for competitive tendering and contracting out", and top management systems were to be used to identify suitable areas of work (p.44). By 1985 46% of central department's maintenance, catering, cleaning, security guarding and laundry services had been contracted out (p.45). Ascher (1987) saw the contracting out of departmental services as closely linked with the Conservative Government's desire to reduce the number of civil servants, resulting in widespread opposition from Civil Service unions (p.45-46).

vi. Continuity and Change

Continuity and Change is the title given to the White Paper on the Civil Service published in July 1994 (HMSO, 1994). This White Paper took a backward look at the main Civil Service reforms, focusing specifically on the Financial Management Initiative, the Next Steps agencies, and the Citizens Charter (p.11-15). Whilst

acknowledging that these initiatives had strengthened the management of the Civil Service and made it more responsive to the needs of the users of its services, the Government was also looking forward to a further improvement in Civil Service performance. The policy that the Government wished to adopt to improve efficiency was to give departments and agencies "further freedoms to make use of a range of management techniques and approaches tailored to their particular circumstances, based on better management information systems and, in the longer term, the introduction of resource accounting and budgeting" (p.2). Included in these freedoms was less detailed central oversight of the "benefits of competition though the privatisation and *Competing for Quality* programmes", and proposed further delegation of responsibility for pay and grading below senior levels to all departments and agencies along with more responsibility for their own management structures "so that these can be matched to their own particular needs". Within the White Paper there were also proposals targeted at the Senior Civil Service including:

- the creation of a new senior management group to comprise all civil servants at grade 5 and above
- a review of senior management structures within departments
- a policy of fair and open competition for top management positions
- revised central graduate recruitment arrangements and more effective management development schemes
- the use of explicit, written employment contracts, comprising fixed term and rolling contracts when appropriate
- and more flexible pay systems (p.3-4).

The government also expressed in the White Paper its intention to examine the conclusions of the House of Commons Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service which was studying the implications of recent developments in the Civil Service and examining amongst other things, "the case for and against a Civil Service Act and new mechanisms to protect standards of conduct and propriety in the Civil Service" (p.4).

Sir Peter Kemp's comment on the White Paper (Kemp, 1994, p.591) was that:

> "Of course, there are white papers and white papers. There are those published to ensure nothing happens, simply to reinforce the status quo. But there are also those which propose useful and necessary change, which lead to action; the present White Paper tends to the first of these".

Whilst praising the White Paper for its endorsement and reassertion of the recent Civil Service reforms associated with delegation and competition, Kemp's main disappointment with the White Paper was "the role of the so-called mandarins'"(p.593). As an ex-senior civil servant himself, having been Second Permanent Secretary in the Cabinet Office and Project Manager for the Next Steps Programme, Kemp saw the mandarins as, "the people who have so far successfully resisted the so called 'revolution' in the civil service" and said that "as a group they are underperforming". He added, "Paradoxically while the management and delivery of public services is

getting better, the policy-making and the translation of policy into action is getting worse". His conclusion was that:

> "The management and delivery sides are being put right and are re-establishing themselves and the White Paper is good here. But it is time now for the Senior Civil Service to face up to its responsibilities to the 21st century and do the same, and the White Paper fails us in this respect which is serious, not just for the jobs that the mandarins have to do but also for the risk it means for the rest of the reform"(p.597).

As a result of the comments received by the Government on the proposals in the White Paper (HMSO, 1994) for improving and managing performance in the Civil Service, and taking into account the Select Committee's findings, another White Paper was published, *The Civil Service: Taking Forward Continuity and Change* (HMSO, 1995). This White Paper set out how the proposals in *Continuity and Change* would be taken forward including:

- the publication of a new Civil Service Code to apply to all civil servants
- enhancing the role of the Civil Service Commissioners as guardians of the principle of selection on merit
- re-emphasising the Government's commitment to maintaining the Civil Service as a good employer, ensuring equality of opportunity within a predominantly career Civil Service offering training and development to all staff

- improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the Civil Service by further delegation of pay and grading and introducing Efficiency Plans to replace the centrally-driven *Competing for Quality* programme
- and confirming the intention to establish the proposed new Senior Civil Service, carry out senior management reviews, introduce new pay arrangements for senior civil servants with contracts for all senior staff (p.1-2).

The White Paper (HMSO, 1995) concluded by stating that:

> "The *Continuity and Change* White Paper set out the Government's proposed approach towards the Civil Service, stretching to the end of the century and beyond, building in an evolutionary way on what has already been achieved. It recognised that the Civil Service is not the property of a single Administration and must serve effectively and efficiently Governments of whatever party. The Government believes that the framework for change set out in this Command Paper, which takes account of the views of the Select Committee and others, will strengthen the Civil Service in ways which are wholly compatible with that underlying purpose" (p.20).

Of all the Civil Service reform initiatives therefore, these two White Papers (HMSO, 1994, and HMSO, 1995) spell out the proposed organisational strategy for the Civil Service at that time.

vii. Other Reforms

Three other Conservative Government reforms will be described briefly in this category. These are the Private Finance Initiative, Open Government and Resource Accounting and Budgeting.

The Private Finance Initiative (PFI) was launched in November, 1992 and by 1995 it had become "one of the Government's main instruments for delivering higher quality and more cost-effective public services" (Treasury, 1995a, p.1). The Treasury document states that the aim of PFI is "to bring the private sector more directly into the provision of public services" and that it is "not simply about the financing of capital investment in services, but about exploiting the full range of private sector management, commercial and creative skills". A Private Finance Panel was created in 1993 to encourage PFI and between 1992 and 1995 over 1,000 potential PFI projects were identified with a capital value around £25 billion (p.9).

The policy of adjusting the balance between in house and private sector provision has continued to evolve under the Labour Government and has become known as Public Private Partnership (PPP) (Glaister, 1999, p.29). Glaister, however, states that a lot of what is referred to as PFI and PPP is in fact no more than best practice procurement of goods and services from private sector suppliers.

A Code of Practice on Access to Government Information was published in draft in 1993 as part of a White Paper on *Open Government* (HMSO, 1993). The White Paper aimed to replace the culture of secrecy which had traditionally prevailed in the Civil Service with a climate of openness, and the main thrust of the code was to ensure that

within the public service, the general rule is that information is given unless there is a good reason not to give it (The Stationery Office, 1998, p.28). The Labour Government has built on this reform by its own *Freedom of Information* legislation (Cabinet Office, 1997a).

In July, 1995 the White Paper, *Better Accounting for the Taxpayer's Money* (Treasury, 1995b) set out the Government's plans to change Government accounting processes to resource accounting. This requires department and agency accounts to be presented similarly to those of commercial organisations, focusing on full rather than simply cash costs. The aim of this financial reform is to present a fuller, more informative picture of resource use, and to link the cost of resources to the achievement of outputs. The timetable for implementation of resource accounting was 1 April 1998 with resource budgeting in place in the 2001 to 2002 financial year (p.3). The programme is a major change to the way Government plans, controls, monitors and reports on public spending and covers not only processes within government but also how Government reports to Parliament (Likierman, 1995, p.562). Likierman explains that the changes are directed at central government departments and their Next Steps agencies and will require considerable effort to bring accruals –based accounting into the Civil Service. He, like other commentators on previous Government initiatives, highlights the need for training to ensure that the full benefits of the proposals are achieved (p.570).

MODERNISING GOVERNMENT: LABOUR GOVERNMENT STRATEGY

Governments are of course themselves subject to change, and the Labour Government published its own White Paper on *Modernising Government* in March 1999 (The Stationery Office, 1999). This White Paper:

> "Sets out a long-term programme of change – change in the way government makes policy, in the way services are delivered, in the way government uses technology and in the way the public service is valued. It will involve everyone working in the public services, and everyone who uses public services" (p.63).

Wider therefore than the *Continuity and Change* White Paper (HMSO, 1994) because it focuses on the public sector, not just the Civil Service, the government's aim is to ensure that "government is both inclusive and integrated" by "ensuring that policy making is more joined up and strategic; making sure that public service users, not providers, are the focus, by matching services more closely to people's lives; and delivering public services that are high quality and efficient" (p.6). In words similar to those used by Sir Peter Kemp in his commentary on *Continuity and Change*, the White Paper looks to take forward the debate on how the public service can be equipped for the 21st century, and to initiate a specific number of steps in the Civil Service including:

- bringing in more people from outside the service
- removing barriers to mobility between departments
- reviewing recruitment procedures
- facilitating early promotion to senior positions for staff with potential
- ensuring that personnel systems provide incentives for innovation, collaborative working and excellent service delivery
- making performance pay systems effective

- creating positive incentives for organisational success
- setting targets to eliminate the under-representation of minority groups
- and training staff in new ways of working to equip them with the skills to meet changing demands (p.61-62).

In addition, a progress report on modernising the Civil Service will be published with Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Departments having personal objectives for actioning the Government's modernisation agenda and ensuring delivery of the key targets (p.62). The Public Service Agreements (PSAs) are one of a number of levers that have been developed by the Government to drive up standards in public services, and the White Paper states that Ministers and their departments will be held accountable for the delivery of these priorities which will be cascaded through targets and measures (p.36).

Following the publication of the *Modernising Government* White Paper four working groups chaired by Permanent Secretaries have been looking at the key Civil Service issues of vision and common principles; bringing in and bringing on talent; performance management; and diversity (Cabinet Office, 1999a). As part of this process, the Civil Service Management Committee comprising the Permanent Heads of Civil Service departments, met at the Civil Service College at the end of September, 1999 to discuss the Civil Service for the 21st century, and considered many proposals from the reports of the working groups. In October, 1999 a staff consultation process on the common framework, and sense of purpose and direction for the Civil Service commenced, and as a first step in this process, all parts of the Civil Service have been encouraged to contribute to the development of the vision and values which inform the

common framework. A fifth group has been working on Civil Service communications but given the sensitivity of the issue this group is being led by Mike Granatt, the public relations adviser to the Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Home Civil Service, Sir Richard Wilson (Walker, 1999). Walker concludes that although the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, "looks unlikely to engage with the machinery of government in the way that Margaret Thatcher did with her extensive programme of reform and innovation" he is, however, driving Civil Service change and "during the next few months, he will imprint his political will on Whitehall"(p.18). We will be returning to the current *Modernising Government* agenda in subsequent chapters of this thesis but for now we will focus on the organisational strategy that was in place at the time that the middle managers were asked about the way in which Civil Service organisational strategy is working on the ground in their departments and agencies. We now therefore begin to turn our attention to how organisational strategy translates into action in this case study.

STRATEGY INTO ACTION

Whilst the previous discussion on the Conservative Government initiatives, and some of the more recent Labour Government policy developments, describes the nature of the Civil Service reforms and their intended outputs, it only partially explains how government strategy has translated into action in departments and agencies. In the first section of this chapter it was pointed out that the then Head of the Home Civil Service, Sir Robin Butler, had likened the themes of the *Reinventing Government* book (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992) to many of the management initiatives that had taken place in the UK government (Butler, 1994). In a revised version of a speech given at Aston University the previous October, Butler (1994) described similarities between Osborne and Gaebler's principle of catalytic government which involved "steering, not rowing",

namely separating the strategic direction from the provision, delegating responsibility, and using outside providers, to the Next Steps agencies and the Private Finance Initiative. He also used the Next Steps reform with its defined objectives and performance measurements, and the market testing programme of the *Competing for Quality* initiative, to make the links with the *Reinventing Government* themes of decentralising authority, competition between service providers, focusing on outcomes not inputs, driving by goals not by rules and regulations, prevention of problems not their treatment, earning money not just spending it, and market rather than bureaucratic mechanisms. The principle of empowering the citizen he maintained could be seen in the Citizen's Charter initiative. Butler concluded that proper training and management systems were necessary to deliver the improvements in quality associated with the reforms.

The focus groups that were conducted with civil servants working as middle managers in May and June, 1997 asked the participants for their perceptions of the Civil Service changes that had taken place in the previous five years, and the impact of change on their own department or agency (see Appendix II). The major changes that participants had observed in their organisations included:

- reduced job security
- lack of promotion opportunities
- greater empowerment
- more pressure

- increased people management responsibilities
- a move towards specialist work
- more of a customer focus.

There was general agreement amongst participants that, "all change has been driven by the need for greater efficiency or to save money" which is in line with Hood's (1991) comment about NPM aiming to do more for less.

However, whilst participants were aware of these wider change drivers in the Civil Service, their major concern was the impact of change in their own organisations and in particular, the effect on them personally and their careers. This concern for themselves and their staff was expressed in comments like,

"When most of us joined the Civil Service we joined because it offered a job which was a job for life with security and with a regular income. That is not there anymore."

"There is a lot of pressure to develop staff, to give them interesting things to do because there is no chance of them getting promoted."

"You suddenly have to do sick absence, welfare procedures and all sorts of things you are not equipped to deal with."

"I don't feel empowered, I feel dumped upon."

"Introducing all these changes is adding to the management load without taking away anything else."

> "I have done a series of specialist jobs over the years, having to learn a whole new set of skills without any training."

It is interesting to reflect how far these changes relate to the NPM doctrines as outlined by Hood (1991) and the *Reinventing Government* principles of Osborne and Gaebler (1992). Whilst the increased empowerment and customer focus can clearly be seen in these new ways of thinking, other changes are more by products of the introduction of changed structures and working practices. For instance Hood's doctrine which stresses greater discipline and parsimony in resource use could be expected to result in more pressure for middle managers, whilst the disaggregation of departments into agencies, and the shift to greater competition, will lead to a feeling of reduced job security and lack of promotion opportunities. The move to increased professionalism in the Civil Service to meet the challenge of change has resulted in a need for more specialists rather than generalist administrators, and the delegation of personnel responsibilities to line managers in connection with the human resource management strategy has meant an increased involvement in staffing issues.

Some of the other comments made by the focus group attenders on these changes are illuminating. On the question of increased competition in the Civil Service, one of the participants made an observation about the market testing process that had taken place in her department:

> "We went through market testing and that was a huge shift, very demoralising. We were fortunate that we did win ours but the whole

process took about two and a half years and we lost quite a lot of staff. Some people just simply could not cope with it."

Another commented on the move to more of a customer focus:

"You need to have a proper customer focus. Unless you do it properly you have the spectre of privatisation hanging over you. You have got to sell yourself to your internal customer or you are going to be dead in the water."

And on the changes generally:

"The front line is changing quite dramatically and I think all these initiatives are having very much more impact on people where they are actually delivering the services."

Some people were cynical about the changes that had occurred:

"I think the problem is that some of the changes have been half baked from my experience. They think they can just bring these things in from the private sector and put them in the public sector and the initiatives are just going to happen."

Others were overwhelmed by all the change they had experienced:

"It is just one initiative after the other."

"It is hard to push that (initiative) down as a credible aim and goal because it seems like another flavour for however long it lasts for."

On the question of increased specialisation, it is interesting to reflect that as can be seen in figure 2.6 in chapter 2, 42% of respondents to the survey questionnaire considered themselves to be specialists. Respondent's perceptions, however, of what constituted specialist work varied from the more traditional jobs in the specialist grades such as accountants, economists and statisticians to newer specialisms involving the management of projects, personnel, information and IT systems. One respondent ticked "no" to question 6 on the questionnaire (see Appendix IV) asking whether the person was a specialist but added wryly, "we would like to be classified as such". This is an issue that will explored further in the next three chapters on the training strategy and linking mechanisms. A more detailed analysis of the survey respondents' perception of how business objectives have changed in their departments and agencies, and how these changes have affected them in their jobs as middle managers, will be examined in detail later in this chapter.

The follow-up interviews, however, that were conducted with some of the survey respondents in the first few months of 1999 provided the opportunity to probe some of these issues in specific departments and agencies more fully (see Appendix VI for a list of the departments and agencies visited). Observations from middle managers about their own organisational changes were often shaped by factors other than those associated with the NPM. In the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce, for example, one of the main factors driving change had been the BSE crisis in 1996, leading to a dramatic increase in staff recruitment, and changed terms and conditions of employment in line with the more devolved personnel functions. In the Military Survey

Agency, and the Department of Trade and Industry, the political changes that had occurred in connection with the ending of the Cold War had had an impact on some of the tasks that were undertaken in the areas in which the middle managers were employed. In the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions, and the Department for Education and Employment, the departmental mergers (of Environment with Transport and Education with Employment) and the associated restructuring had been key change drivers. All interviewees mentioned information technology (IT) as a major force in driving change. Everybody interviewed has their own personal computer with access to electronic mail facilities and often, also, an intranet for information communication purposes. This perception of IT as a driver for change supports the assertions put forward by Bellamy and Taylor (1994) and Muid (1994) that these major initiatives have been overlooked in the NPM and *Reinventing Government* literature.

Like the focus group attenders, the interviwees saw the drivers for change generally not just in term of the NPM and *Reinventing Government* doctrines, although they too spoke of downsizing and empowerment, and improved customer service, but how the changes were affecting them and their own job situations. Thus when asked about the drivers people often mentioned things like pay and grading and promotion. Also given the time lapse between the focus groups and the follow-up interviews, there was more comment from those working in policy jobs about the changes of style as a result of working for a Labour Government. These middle managers reported new Ministers being more demanding about the quality of policy briefings and the speed of response, resulting in faster policy implementation. As a demonstration of this accelerated approach, there has been comment from the Institute of Personnel and Development

about the speed in which the *Learning to Succeed* White Paper (Department for Education and Employment, 1999) was published in June 1999 (Harrison, 1999). This White Paper resulted from a public consultation in the spring of that same year with the intention that a new framework for delivering the government's policy of lifelong learning will be in place after April 2001. Harrison's point is that this White Paper is "going forward at a much livelier pace than previous proposals"(p.69) which would endorse the views of the middle managers interviewed. It is interesting to note how, unlike the previous administration, Labour strategy is rapidly translating into action on policy functions. This contrasts with the views of the policy middle managers who attended the focus group meetings who felt they had seen less change in their bit of the organisation than had those employed on operational work.

Most of the interviewees saw the Investors in People initiative as a driver of change in their organisations. With the stated government target that, "by the year 2000 all civil servants will be employed in organisations recognised as Investors in People" (HMSO, 1996, p.3) this is unsurprising. What these observations do demonstrate again, however, is that middle managers are more concerned with the impact of changes on their departments and agencies. Whether these changes are driven by a wider organisational strategy in line with the NPM or *Reinventing Government* agenda, or by something else such as the attempt to link training strategy to the Civil Service organisational strategy, is to these managers almost irrelevant, their concern is with the way these plans translate into action in their own areas of work. Amongst those middle managers interviewed there was widespread confusion about the wider drivers of change, and the organisational initiatives that had resulted from them. This says much

about how wider organisational visions are communicated in the Civil Service as we shall see when we look at changing objectives in departments and agencies in the next section.

There was, however, widespread agreement that economy and efficiency were the main drivers of change in the Civil Service. This focus on efficiency has resulted in academic comment that, "what we seem to be heading towards in both private and public sectors in the UK is the development of a high output, low commitment work-culture in which trust has become a value of the past and where quality counts for far less than quantity" (Hoggett, 1996, p.28). If this is true, it has widespread implications for the training strategy and the mechanisms used to link this strategy to the organisational strategy. Given Storey's definition of strategic HRM which was mentioned in chapter one, namely the "strategic deployment of a highly committed and capable workforce" (Storey, 1995, p.5) and the subsequent discussion about the desirability or otherwise of commitment (Iles, Mabey and Robertson, 1990) if the implicit organisational strategy of the Civil Service is to achieve high output even if this is at the expense of commitment, then the mechanisms selected to link training strategy to organisational strategy will reflect that fact. These issues will be explored in more depth in the next four chapters.

Inter-country comparisons of public sector reforms (Pollitt and Summa, 1997, p.7) have identified that a uniform 'one-track' picture of change is inaccurate. Pollitt and Summa's comparison of fifteen years of change in Finland, New Zealand, Sweden and the UK was based on six dimensions; privatisation, marketisation, decentralisation,

output orientation, traditional restructuring, and the intensity of the reform programme itself. They concluded that the reforms were very different in the countries analysed. Research into machinery of government changes in Australia, Canada and the UK between 1950 and 1997 (Davis, Weller, Craswell and Eggins, 1999) similarly found national differences, attributing these to the political, policy, and administrative calculations made by Prime Ministers. Interestingly, these researchers identified a relatively low degree of machinery change in the UK since 1974 with only a few departmental reorganisations (p.27). These findings contrast with the radical reform of the Civil Service during the same period and the choice of Next Steps agencies to deliver the strategic objectives concerned with the continued improvements in public service performance. The next section will refocus on these strategic intentions, using the data from the research project to feed in the views of middle managers about how their own departmental and agency objectives have changed in line with the reform agenda.

CHANGING OBJECTIVES IN DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES

THE QUESTION OF CONTROL

> "The setting of clear, stretching performance targets is a key part of the philosophy underpinning Next Steps. It is those targets which drive agencies towards the provision of better quality services and better value for the taxpayer. Open and accessible reporting of performance against the targets which the Government has set enables agencies to demonstrate how effectively they have discharged the task which they have been set. More importantly, it enables people to form a judgement on whether Agencies have performed to the standards which they, as citizens, are entitled to expect".
>
> *Next Steps Report 1997*

This paragraph from the *Next Steps Report 1997* (Cabinet Office, 1998c, p.1) makes explicit why the executives agencies were established and the framework agreements under which they operate. The framework documents include details of the agency's aims and objectives and their financial management arrangements, including financial objectives, planning, reporting and accounting systems (Goldsworthy, 1991). Their collective progress towards meeting these objectives is contained in the *Next Steps Report*, formerly known as the *Next Steps Review* with individual detailed performance outlined in each agency's Annual Report and Accounts. The overall performance of the 138 executive agencies which were in operation in 1996-97, plus the four departments operating on Next Steps lines, was that 75% of their total of 1244 key targets were met during the period, a fall of 4% from the previous year (Cabinet Office, 1998c, p.1).

In the same way that the principle of setting out objectives was central to both the creation of the Next Steps agencies and the Financial Management Initiative under the previous Conservative Government, so the Labour Government has introduced 28 separate Public Service Agreements (PSAs) in a White Paper which contains over 350 new performance targets for the public services (Treasury, 1998). Both the Conservative and Labour Governments have been described as highly centralist in this respect (Riddell, 1999, p.16). Riddell uses the slogan, "money for modernisation" to describe the PSAs as "implicit bargains that the extra resources of public services announced in the Comprehensive Spending Review of July 1998 should be tied to specific improvements in outcomes across the whole range of government". He feels, however, that the targets are more like goals than objectives and, whilst highly desirable and specific, some are beyond the ability of any government department to deliver (p.17). New mechanisms though have been established for delivering progress, and new machinery put in place for monitoring it, in the shape of three year spending plans, a new Cabinet committee to oversee the implementation, and an advisory panel to bring in private sector expertise of managing change in large and complex organisations (Milburn, 1999, p.18). The introduction of Resource Accounting and Budgeting will provide the formal framework for financial reporting against the targets set out in the PSAs (Codling, 1999, p.22). Codling's view is that the publication of PSAs and the reporting against them should improve accountability.

Research undertaken in diversified corporations in the private sector (Goold and Campbell, 1987) has looked at the role of the centre in strategic decision making. Goold and Campbell's study of 16 British firms focuses on the way that the centre influences managers lower down and affects the decisions that they make (p.35). Using

two dimensions of the centre's influence process, namely planning influence and control influence, they identified eight different management approaches and categorise the companies in their sample according to these styles. Whilst there is a danger in taking too far an analogy between the public service and the corporate sector, there are important messages from the research (Jervis and Richards, 1997, p.14). Jervis and Richards state that given the demands placed on the public service, "an attempt to model a 'core executive' role around a financial control style is doomed to fail. The model to emulate, with appropriate safeguards for the different context, is the strategic planning style". They see instead, however, "a traditional preoccupation with control"(p.14).

Certainly within Goold and Campbell's description of control influence which is the way the centre reacts to results achieved by subsidiaries through setting objectives, monitoring performance and following through with pressures and incentives, (p.40-41), there can be seen the elements of government control associated with agency framework documents and PSAs. Regulation inside government has increased in formality, complexity, intensity and specialisation over the past twenty years (Hood et al, 1998, p.62). These researchers conclude that regulation inside UK government, including audit systems, grievance chasing, standard setting, inspection and evaluation, approaches, if not exceeds, the scale of regulation of private business.

Three fundamental but interlocking strategies of control have been identified in the public service (Hoggett, 1996, p.12). Hoggett argues that, one, there has been a major shift towards the creation of operationally decentralised units (Next Steps agencies in the Civil Service) with a simultaneous attempt to increase centralised control over

strategy and policy; two, that the principle of competition has become the main method of co-ordinating the activities of decentralised units; and, three, there has been a substantial development of performance management and monitoring systems. These strategies, Hoggett asserts, are associated with the re-emergence of bureaucratic mechanisms, and the public sector has experienced simultaneous centralisation and decentralisation. The last sub-section will revisit this area of performance measurement in the Civil Service but first the views of managers in departments and agencies concerning their own organisation's objectives will be analysed to determine just how far these have changed in line with the government's reform programme, and the implications for civil servants working in the middle management grades.

THE VIEWS OF MIDDLE MANAGERS

Question 16 on the survey questionnaire asked middle managers whether their department or agency's business objectives had changed over the previous three years see Appendix IV). The responses to this question are shown at figure 3.2:

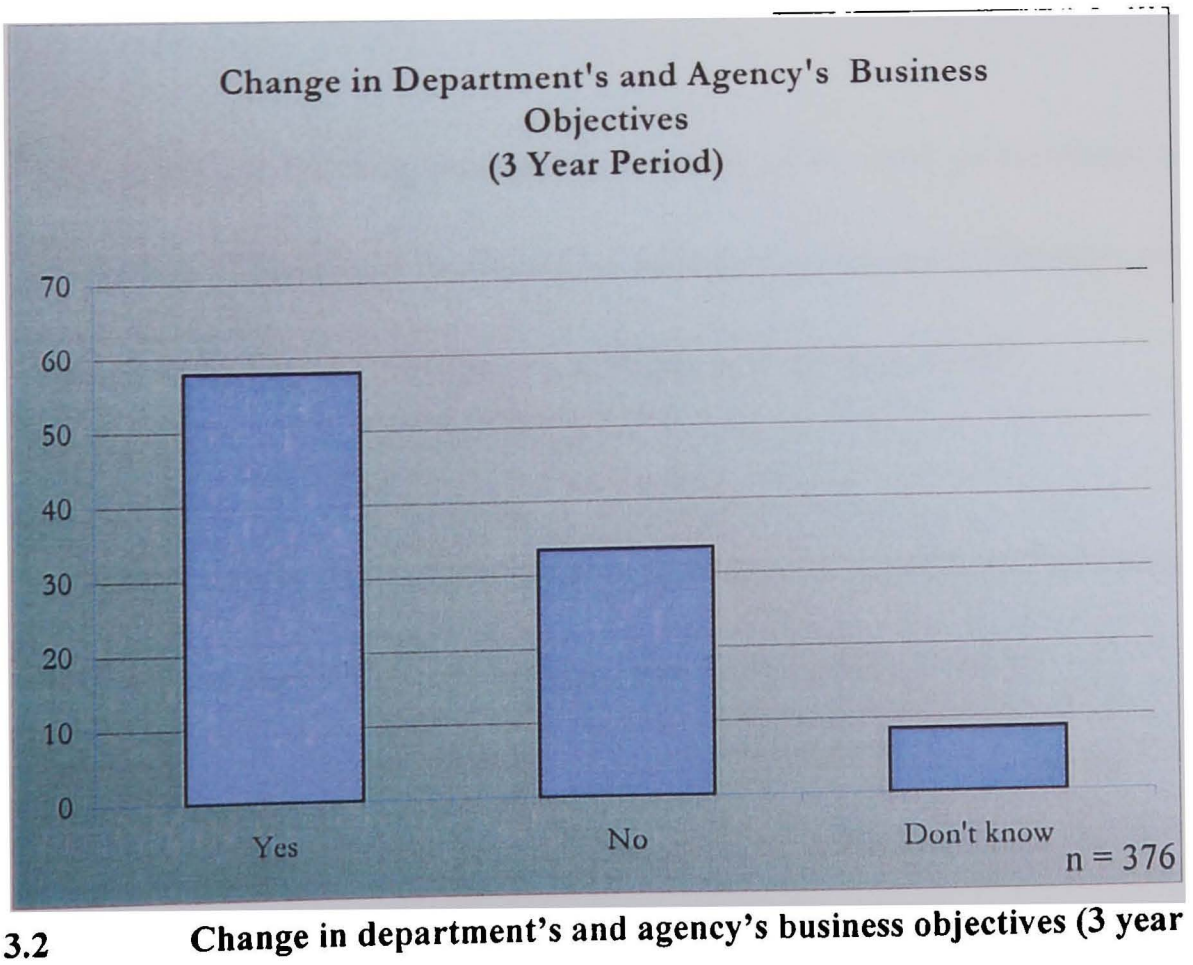


Fig 3.2 **Change in department's and agency's business objectives (3 year period)**

The results on the face of it are somewhat surprising. Given the continued drive for improvement in Civil Service performance during the period 1994 to 1997 it is not unreasonable to expect that department and agency business objectives would alter to reflect this on-going change of emphasis. Of the 42% who answered "no" or "don't know" to this question there was some confusion about how in fact objectives had changed, if at all. Some of the typical comments given by these respondents are:

> "Although I have indicated 'no' as the bottom line remains much the same there is also an element of constant flux"

> "No real change although more emphasis now on accuracy rather than speed with a reduced number of staff/budget"

> "I am aware of a slight change of emphasis but that only seems to be on paper, not in practice"

> "Changes are filtering through as a result of the new government coming to power. These will no doubt be reflected in the next business planning round when the full impact on this job will be identified"

> "Overall aim is probably the same but there is a great deal of change, for example in the budgetary system, and Investors in People"

"Although the main objectives may not have changed, changing customer needs have meant changes to the data we collect"

"I think that there may have been changes but I am not clear as to what they are"

"Objectives as such have not changed. However, the changes generally have meant that service delivery required changes in processes and procedures"

"Focus has changed under the requirement to deliver value for money and realise economies. The underlying pressure is still the same; pay the correct benefits to the right person at the right time. What is changing is the mechanisms for obtaining this objective".

This lack of clarity among some respondents about changing business objectives in their own departments and agencies raises some interesting questions about the individual organisational effectiveness of targets in driving Civil Service change. As has already been stated, target setting is a fundamental philosophy behind the Next Steps agencies and the *Next Steps Report 1997* (Cabinet Office, 1998c) published performance against targets for each of the executive agencies for the financial year 1996/97. It also gives the targets for 1997/98 which are specified in greater detail in each agency's business plan. As an example of this practice the summary of the 1999/2000 business plan for the Civil Service College lists five key performance targets as follows:

Break-even (£m)*	0
Consultancy Income (£000)	1,100
Senior Civil Service Students	1,900
Private Sector Students	900
Course Evaluations	89%

*As a net running cost regime, the College is required to cover the costs of running its training courses from the income it receives from its students.

During the follow-up interviews that were conducted with a selection of survey respondents, the researcher asked the interviewees about their level of knowledge of their organisation's targets for the current financial year. Although not always able to state them in detail, most interviewees had a vague idea of what the key targets were for their department or agency. Some though had greater clarity about this than others.

In order to probe these differences in perception more closely, the responses to question 16 in the survey questionnaire were analysed by grade of respondent. The graph at figure 3.3 shows the different responses by grade to this particular question.

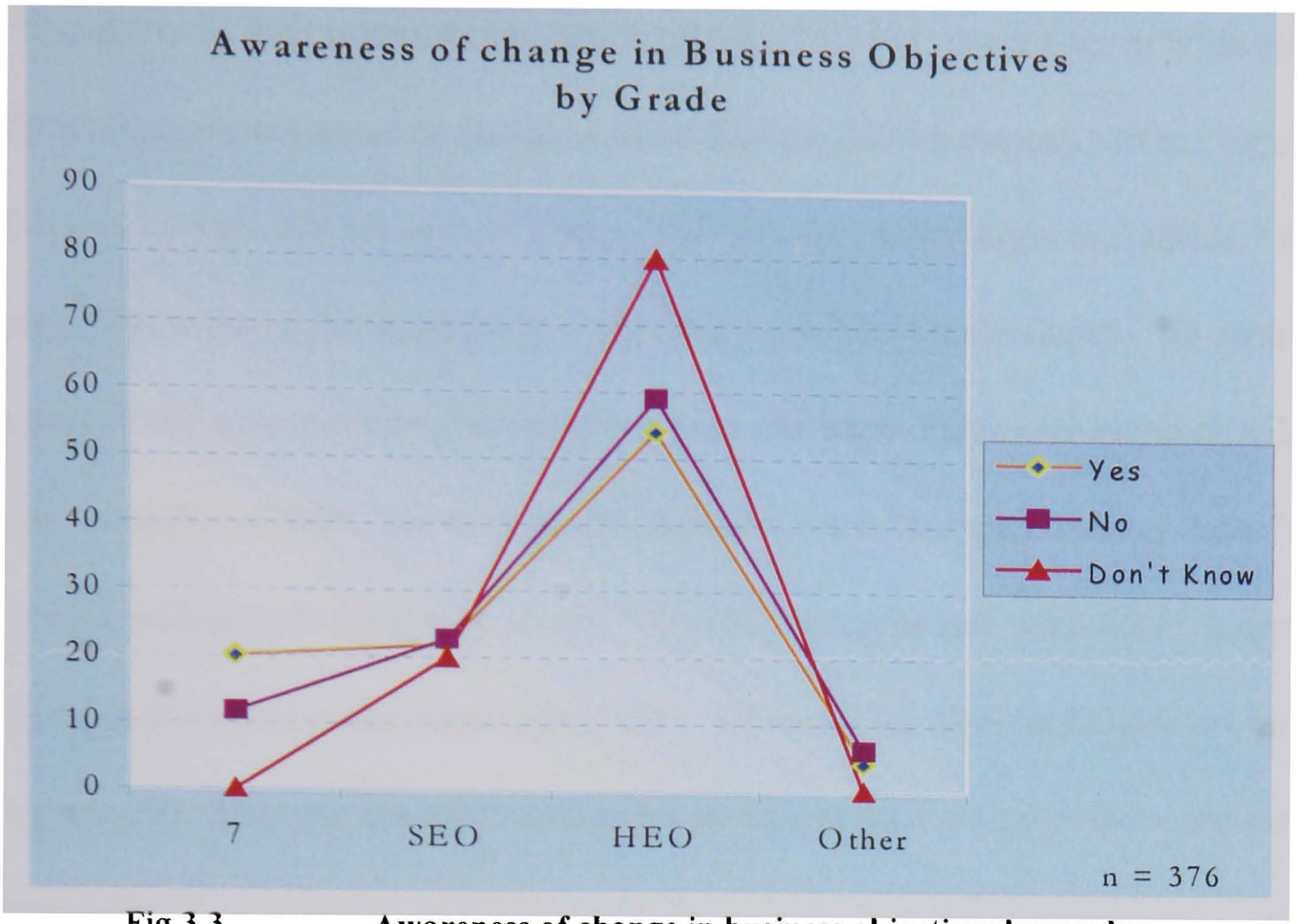


Fig 3.3 Awareness of change in business objectives by grade

The results of this analysis are illuminating and warrant further investigation by departments and agencies. There is a clear relationship between grade of respondent and the level of awareness of change in their organisation's business objectives. Not one grade 7 respondent failed to know whether their business objectives had changed, whereas 80% of those responding "don't know" were in the HEO grade and the remaining 20% SEOs. Many more grade 7s replied that their department's and agency's business objectives had changed, more HEOs replied that they had not changed whereas for those in the SEO grade the proportions were fairly evenly spread. Although no organisational analysis of grade responses were made, it is clear that as communication about objectives filters down the department or agency through the hierarchical levels, the degree of awareness falls.

When asked about how departmental and agency business objectives are communicated to managers in their organisation (see Appendix VII) follow-up interviewees spoke about management plans or business plans that specified these objectives. One interviewee said that his agency's targets are not very meaningful and added, "there are some objectives in the management plan that I just don't understand". He spoke about copies of the management plan for the agency and each directorate being distributed to every member of staff. He said though that they were "dropped on their desks" with no verbal briefing as to what they meant. He said, "some people who didn't understand them put the plans in the waste paper bin". However, he also explained that in his organisation there are annual briefings for groups of staff although these are not very interactive.

Other interviewees told similar stories; managers and staff receiving copies of strategy documents and business plans, some with a covering letter, followed by presentations from senior management to give more information about the contents. These overall departmental or agency objectives then feed down into lower level organisational objectives for directorates, divisions and teams, and finally into individual objectives for the interviewees.

Another interviewee agreed that the business plan for her agency was "a bit indigestible" and felt that some of the more junior staff would have difficulty linking their own objectives to the organisation's targets. In answer to the question "Do you have your own operational objectives for this reporting year?" as part of the follow-up interviews not one person answered "no" although there was much less clarity about how their achievement against objectives was measured. All had annual performance

reviews as part of the reporting process, some had more frequent reviews during the reporting year. All were aware of the SMART acronym for their individual objectives, namely that they should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable (or Agreed), Realistic (or Relevant) and Timebound. However, there was much less agreement about how SMART their own objectives are, and how their performance is being monitored. Some of the interviewees involved in policy work felt that it was more difficult to make their objectives SMART although in conjunction with their line manager they all tried to do so. One of the quotes from a senior line manager who was interviewed is enlightening on the question of objectives:

> "Last year we drew up in preparation for our business planning round a statement of purpose and key objectives. I did some workshops with people about taking the high level statement of purpose and the six key objectives that we proposed and worked out what the main tasks were. It was an important exercise for me to have done because I can see that if you help people through the process they can very quickly link their work into the key objectives. I think that we can often do more about that".

There are some key messages in this quote about how organisational business objectives can be more meaningfully communicated in departments and agencies.

The survey questionnaire asked those respondents ticking "yes" to question 16 to specify the changes that had occurred in their department or agency's business

objectives. The qualitative responses have been analysed and are shown in a bar chart at figure 3.4.

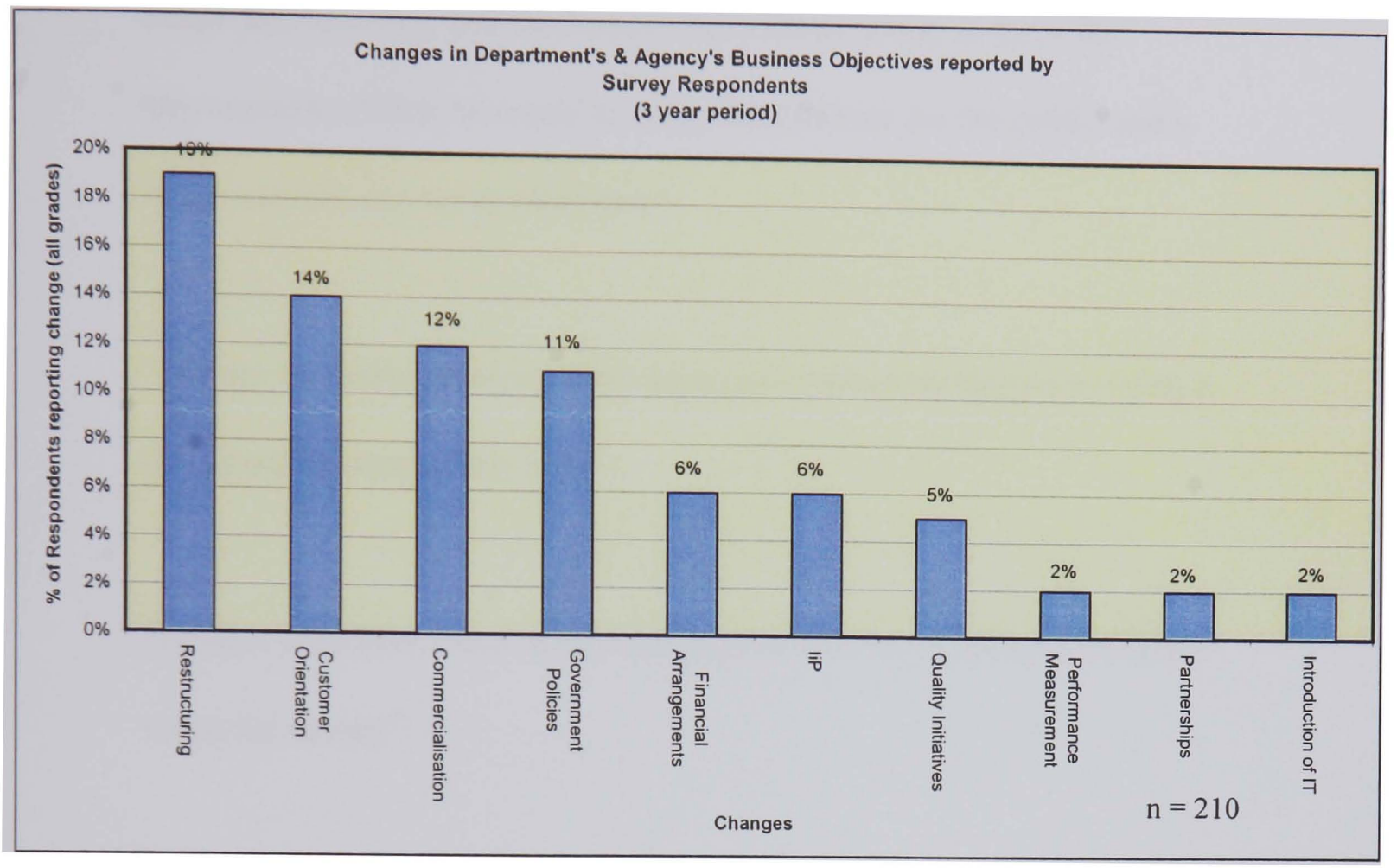


Fig 3.4 Changes in department's and agency's business objectives reported by survey respondents (3 year period).

It can be seen from this chart that by far the largest change reported by respondents (19%) was some sort of organisational restructuring, followed by more of a customer orientation, increased commercialisation and changes in their department or agency as a result of government policy. The sort of comments made by respondents about these changes are as follows:

> "The changes are too numerous to mention. Key developments have been merger with Department of Education to form Department for Education and Employment, the new Government from May 1997 and a whole range of welfare to work policies"

"The Department of the Environment, and the Department of Transport Regional Office, joined with the Regional Office of Department of Trade and Industry, and the Employment Department, to form the Government Office, to create an integrated service for the public and a more relevant service to Ministers"

"We are currently changing from being a Government agency to being a non-departmental public body"

"Greater customer focus, improved responsiveness to change and better value for money"

"There has been an increased emphasis on serving the customer rather than deciding the important outputs ourselves"

"Becoming more proactive in reaching customers and developing solutions to their problems"

"Outsourcing service delivery and the private finance initiative"

"A move from provision of services to outside procurement"

"Move to a business focused, output based organisation. Culture change from role culture to business culture"

"More and more value for money with the need for business acumen as we enter commercial contracts"

"The new administration has refocused objectives slightly"

"Change to take account of the new Labour Government's plans for the NHS"

"The department's main aims and objectives have changed in the light of policy changes following the change of government in May 1997. Many of the objectives promote the same broad aims as before but with a different emphasis"

The increased customer orientation and commercialisation are changes that would be expected given the reforms associated with *The Citizens Charter* (HMSO, 1991) and the *Competing for Quality* (Treasury, 1991) and Private Finance initiatives. The machinery of government changes initiated by the new Labour administration was the largest machinery change since 1974 with one new department created, two abolished and one further department created through amalgamation (Davis, Weller, Craswell and Eggins, 1999, p.27).

The other changes reported by respondents are also unsurprising. Changes to financial arrangements and the introduction of Investors in People and new technology, along with an increased focus on performance measurement and partnerships have result from

new initiatives and changed government policy with a continued emphasis on the use of targets to drive performance improvements. A selection of the changes reported by the respondents are:

"Change to resource accounting and budgeting and output costing. Emphasis on IIP"

"Resource accounting and budgeting, PFI projects, partnering, front line first, defence cost studies"

"More streamlining of procedures and costs. Developing pilot unit cost work to drive improvements. Developing a computerised caseworking programme"

Partnerships with the private sector"

"Over the last one to two years resource accounting has been introduced in the planning and finance division and this has significantly altered the way we look at how we account for the overall spend. The objectives are now more outcomes based"

"Moving towards an internal purchaser/provider system; less use of paper and more use of technology; more customer focused; change to the agency's culture; use of the business excellence model"

"We have embarked upon widespread introduction of IT and also have made our records more accessible to outside organisations"

"The most significant change in my view is the adoption of an inspirational aim of becoming world class in all we do".

The quality initiatives associated with the use of the Business Excellence Model (BEM) mentioned by some of the respondents are interesting. A benchmarking project was introduced in 1996, using the BEM developed by the European Foundation for Quality Management, with the aim of helping agencies improve quality and efficiency in the delivery of services (Carlton, 1998, p.16). The *Guide to the Executive Agencies* states that thirty agencies were involved in the initial stage, using the British Quality Foundation's Rapid Score self-assessment methodology, and plans were developed to improve key areas identified through the process. A database of results of this initial phase and two subsequent ones is managed by the Civil Service College and used to promote the spread of best practice in the Civil Service.

The impact that all these identified changes have had on the jobs of middle managers will be examined in detail in the next section of this chapter. The driving force behind all the initiatives, however, has been to increase attention on the measurable aspects of performance in departments and agencies, and the final sub-section under the heading of changing objectives explores the whole issue of performance measurement in the public sector before focusing again on the middle managers involved in the case study.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT IN THE CIVIL SERVICE

In March 1998 the focus of the Next Steps policy moved from the creation of new agencies to one of performance improvement (Cabinet Office, 1998d, p.1). The *Next Steps Briefing Note* produced by the Efficiency and Effectiveness Group in the Cabinet Office in September 1998 states that this improvement in the quality, efficiency and convenience to users of agency services will involve " increased Ministerial focus on target setting and performance reporting, benchmarking performance against comparable organisations and a new emphasis on co-operation between agencies and other public service deliveries, designed to achieve better value for money and quality of service" (p.2). This continuing development of performance-based management with its focus on measurement does, however, present special difficulties for the public service (Stewart and Walsh, 1994). Stewart and Walsh argue that fully satisfactory measures of performance are unlikely ever to be discovered in the public sector because performance can never be finally defined, and that the imperfections and limitations of measures should be recognised. Rather than placing total reliance on measures, they suggest instead that they should be used as a part of the assessment process to form a judgement of performance (p.46). The inadequacies of performance reporting by executive agencies have been highlighted by Hyndman and Anderson (1998) who undertook a time-series empirical analysis of the performance information in four sets of agency annual reports. Their study found that "there was a significant proportion of agencies reporting little or no information on efficiency and effectiveness and the various component parts of performance (i.e. inputs, outputs and results)"(p.28). They concluded that, "while improvement has occurred, much remains to be done to facilitate the effective discharge of accountability by agencies"(p.29). The *Next Steps Report 1997* (Cabinet Office, 1998c) expressed disappointment with agency efficiency

measures. It said, "the Government considers that it is clearly unacceptable that after 10 years of Next Steps agencies over £11 billion of administrative expenditure (72%) within agencies remains uncovered by real and reliable measures of efficiency" (p.3). The areas that the report highlighted where some agencies fall below the best in measuring their performance included:

- "using crude measures of customer satisfaction which could be easily manipulated"
- "basing performance measures on what it is traditional or easiest to measure"
- "using unquantified milestones"
- "lack of clarity about the meaning of targets and how achievement against them will be judged"
- "setting performance measures which can encourage perverse behaviours such as timeliness targets which do not take into account the age of uncleared items"
- "failure to differentiate between standards and performance targets"
- "concentrating on processes which are internal to the agency rather than the outputs which are important to the people"
- "and focusing on wider issues rather than the quality and efficiency of its own outputs" (p.3).

The PSA targets published in the White Paper (Treasury, 1998) have as far as possible been expressed in terms of the end results or service standards (p.1) with the aim of improving target-setting. It is interesting that at the same time that there is an increasing focus on performance information, weaknesses have been identified in the

reporting system. Middle managers in the Civil Service have also reported more performance measurement in their own organisations as illustrated in figure 3.4. Some of their comments are:

> "We are now having to define our customers and record their objectives and how we will interact with them. There is more emphasis on performance measures"

> "There is now greater clarity and emphasis on targets and goals"

> "Higher priority is given to public enquiries and records issues. New areas of subject interest have been added to the information needs of customers with a concentration on objectives, targets and performance indicators"

> "The agency has become more focused and accountable in its operations. We now have to forecast expenditure estimates and account for any changes".

The effect that this increasing accountability and focus on performance measurement was having on the middle managers, particularly those working in Next Steps agencies, was expressed in some critical comments on the survey questionnaire such as:

"I am much more cost and target conscious. I have to deal with a fast moving working environment and I now feel very vulnerable with no sense of job security"

"There has been a dramatic drop in resources since the introduction of the service level agreement. This change has demanded target driven performance that has had a negative impact on the extent of the service each adviser can provide"

And more positively:

"There is greater clarity in my role with a clearer definition of departmental responsibilities. This has given me a great degree of autonomy, and more responsibility with increased flexibility in working practices"

"The organisation has become more targeted around our business vision of more professional management, improved customer service and equipping staff for change"

"We are more focused on deliverables, especially saving money. Personally I now have more challenging objectives and my own performance is measured against these. I am also more responsible for the performance of my team".

The issue of performance measurement and management by targets will be recurring again in the following chapters on training strategy and linking mechanisms but for now the wider impact of Civil Service reform and changing business objectives on the jobs of middle will be explored further in the next section of this chapter.

THE IMPACT OF CHANGE ON THE JOBS OF MIDDLE MANAGERS

REINVENTION OR RHETORIC?

Much has already been written in this chapter on the New Public Management and the *Reinventing Government* doctrines, and the Civil Service reforms that have taken place over recent years. Some of the initial views of middle managers about these changes have also been used to highlight the various issues connected with these public service initiatives. This section presents the opportunity to examine in more detail exactly how far the jobs of middle managers have changed and whether or not they have been "reinvented", or if the changes are in fact little more than rhetoric.

As a starting point to this discussion, the survey respondents were asked in question 17 on the questionnaire (see Appendix IV) how the changes in their department or agency's business objectives had impacted on their job. The qualitative answers to this question have been analysed and are shown at table 3.1.

IMPACT OF CHANGING BUSINESS OBJECTIVES ON JOBS OF MIDDLE MANAGERS

Changing EmphasisOn Job Tasks	Percentage Unsolicited Responses by Grade							
	Grade 7		SEO		HEO		Total	
	Increase +	Decrease -	Increase +	Decrease -	Increase +	Decrease -	Increase +	Decrease -
Volume of Work	11		17		16		15	
Diversity of Work	39		13		14	1	19	0.5
Responsibility & accountability	2		8		11	3	9	1
Business Focus	5		10		6		7	
Customer Service	5		15	2	8	3	9	1
Staff Management	11		13		5	1	8	0.5
Financial Management	7		6		8		8	
Performance Management	5		4		10		8	
Use of Information Technology	2		4		8		6	

n = 210

Table 3.1 Impact of changing business objectives on jobs of middle managers

It can be seen that this table lists the changing emphasis on job tasks, and gives the percentage of unsolicited responses by grade according to whether there was an increasing or decreasing emphasis. In the same way that the effect of the increased focus on performance measurement was viewed unfavourable by some survey respondents, and favourably by others, so the job changes will have meant that there was more or less emphasis on that part of the middle manager's job as determined by their own perceptions of the impact of the changes in their organisations. The changes to jobs identified by the survey respondents have been labelled (a) to (i) respectively

and will be discussed in turn as follows, feeding in comments and observations obtained from the follow-up interviews.

(a) Volume of Work

There has been widespread agreement amongst the middle managers that the volume of work has increased as a result of the organisational strategy. A total of 15% of managers volunteered this as a change in the survey but when questioned during the follow-up interviews, everyone felt that their workload had increased. When pressed to try and quantify this increase, managers talked about the volume of work going up by about 20% to 25% over the last few years. Some of the comments from the survey respondents are representative of the views of many manager about the volume of work they are now expected to undertake:

"Increasing workloads is a direct result of less staff. There have been a blurring of roles so that I have become involved in areas which were not previously my responsibility"

"More work with the same amount or less staff in the same number of hours"

"I do the routine work, giving little thought as to how this fits in with the overall objectives. They don't seem relevant when you are up against deadlines and wanting to clear work. We are always expected to do more"

"There is more pressure on staff with higher stress levels. More people are now seeking welfare assistance"

"More pressure of work and more downward management. I have more responsibility with less time to spend on developing and motivating the staff within my team".

From these comments it is clear that there is a link between the volume of middle management workloads and the diversity of duties undertaken, and the responsibility levels attached to the jobs. During the three year period from 1 April 1994 to 1 April 1997 the total number of middle managers (full-time equivalents) working in the HEO, SEO and level 7 grades fell from 97,670 to 85,350, a drop of 13% (Cabinet Office, 1997b, p.42). Within these three grades, the *Civil Service Statistics 1997* gives the biggest reduction at HEO level, falling from 57,500 to 47,750, a drop of 17%. Not surprisingly, some of the most emotive comments about workloads and responsibility levels have made by middle managers working in the HEO grades.

However, higher grades also spoke about increasing workloads. One line manager who was interviewed working at grade 7 level mentioned that his job was previously three posts. During the interview his phone rang several times and he was called out of the interview to deal with urgent work on one occasion. Although clearly very conscientious, this manager spoke of the difficulties of spending time with staff, watching them work and helping them with their development needs. This was a theme reiterated again and again by line managers who felt that whilst the more target driven tasks were cleared, this was often at the expense of the staff management

responsibilities. The Investors in People initiative is designed to ensure that people development is made a priority in organisations and although this issue will be discussed in more detail in the next four chapters, the point about workloads clearly has an impact on the ability of managers to successfully undertake their staff management role.

Some managers also spoke about their own training and development needs not being met because they were too busy to go on training courses. One manager said of a time of high workload, "during that busy period I did not go on any training courses at all because it was quite difficult enough getting to the bank at lunchtime". In addition to the volume of workload, many managers who were interviewed spoke of the quicker turnaround times required for work tasks. Deadlines for work were often target driven, for example, one specialist (a statistician) spoke of a 20 day operational objective to answer requests for complex statistical information. These quicker response times have often been facilitated by the introduction of new technology. One interviewee said of electronic mail, "there are a lot more informal communications now. Requests for work come down by E-mail and there are short turn-around times. We are expected to react quickly which may mean less time to be proactive". One of the most interesting comments on workloads generally came from a middle manager working at HEO level in a large Next Steps agency. He said:

> "When I first came to work in London in 1989 I was one of 33 HEOs who worked in my district. That number of managers was reduced to about 10 over a period of 7 or 8 years or so with not much of a reduction in staff numbers. Management commands increased from 20 to 25 staff

per manager to nearer a hundred staff. I think a lot of people have problems not just with the staff increases but also because they are covering more than one site. It is more and more work for less and less managers. One office was originally managed by a grade 7 with 4 or 5 HEOs on the management team; that same office is now managed by an HEO".

Whilst this quote is at the extreme end of increasing volumes of work for middle managers, the issues arising from this change in terms of training strategy and the link with organisational strategy will be explored in subsequent chapters.

(b) Diversity of Work

Increased diversity of work was the biggest change identified by the survey respondents. By far the majority of middle managers felt that tasks were more diverse as a result of changing business objectives, a small minority though felt that jobs were narrower and less interesting, mainly due to work pressures and targets. It is interesting to note that the largest recorded increase in diversity was reported by managers working at grade 7 level. One of these managers who works in one of the Government Office for the Regions stated:

"A wider knowledge is expected and I am working with colleagues who come from very different departmental cultures. I have had to attend a lot more meetings and I am expected to be familiar with a range of issues in my representational role"

Whilst work in a Government Office is at the leading edge of collaborative working arrangements, the increased diversity of tasks is in line with the Labour Government's agenda of joined-up service delivery. More arrangements like this can be expected as a result of the *Modernising Government* White Paper (The Stationery Office, 1999). Other managers too reported an increase in diversity of work as a result of increased commercialism in their organisations, and the need for liaison with suppliers, customers and other external stakeholders. Some who had traditionally been specialists were expected to become involved in other areas of work. One person said, "I am now expected to develop policy and deal with policy issues whereas I used to deal with science issues only". There was a clear move towards more staff management and financial management tasks as will be described shortly.

(c) Responsibility and Accountability

The overlap between volume and diversity of work, and increasing responsibility and accountability has previously been stated. Many of the comments from survey respondents and interviewees, provide an insight into how responsibility levels have increased, particularly in the Next Steps agencies. Given the quote from the HEO manager about increasing workloads for office managers, it is only to be expected that middle managers at that grade would assert the largest increase in responsibility and accountability.

Survey respondents reported increased accountability for both resources and results which were budget and target driven. Increasing delegations were mentioned by some, one unfavourable comment on this trend was, "delegations have made it more difficult

to carry out core work because of the increasing number of overhead tasks and weaker central guidance. Changes are not supported from above". Changing organisational structures, as well as devolved budgets and targets, were credited with increasing responsibility and accountability, "internally we have a new flatter management structure which means that there are more requirements to adopt empowered management tools". Some managers commented on a culture change, "there has been a culture change in the organisation, moving from reactive to proactive with an increasing involvement of staff in planning and organisation" and "I have been empowered to take on responsibilities previously undertaken by more senior managers" but others thought that there had been a movement backwards, "the attitudes have gone back to pre-agency days and customer service has been abandoned in favour of counting the pennies; there are less staff to do the job and empowerment has been abandoned". Whilst inherently interesting in themselves, these differences in perception by middle managers also demonstrate the diverse nature of the Civil Service and how a centrally driven organisational strategy will in practice be shaped by the realities in operation in the decentralised departments and agencies.

(d) Business Focus

There was much more agreement amongst middle managers about the increased business focus in their organisations. As has already been stated, privatisation is one of several possibilities to be considered before a service is accepted for agency status and may be considered at an existing agency's five year review (Carlton, 1998, p.15). Carlton states that eleven agencies have been wholly privatised since 1993 and three agency functions are wholly contracted out. It has been argued that further privatisation is likely under the Labour Government (Harding, 1999, p.13). The business type

changes that middle managers had experienced in their jobs, however, were along the following lines:

"I am now working in a commercial environment"

"Agency status has created the need to be more commercially minded with regard to service delivery"

"We are changing from a Civil Service mentality to a far more business like office with greater respect for the commercial field"

"There is more concentration on business and operational systems and training and development requirements which reflect people's ability to achieve business objectives"

"My job is now to ensure my part of the organisation is prepared to go to competition and win a bid by changing culture and working practices"

"We are much more business focused – looking for value for money, better results, and efficiencies by reviewing working practices"

"I act more as a business manager now".

(e) Customer Service

Customer service though was another area where there were differing perceptions of whether there was an increasing or decreasing emphasis on job tasks. One survey respondent said that the organisation had become more business-like but that the resulting costs control had meant that managers were, "unable to provide the desired service to customers, in other words, quality had been sacrificed for quantity", and this sort of observation was supported by other managers. Overall though people had seen an increasing focus on customer service. A follow-up interviewee who works in procurement said that:

> "My job is more focused on results now. We are also more focused on what our customers needs are. As an example, we let a stationery contract about a year ago. Before then we would have just told our customers what they could have and how they were going to get it. Now we tend to find out what they want to get them on board and make them feel nice about it".

Other managers spoke about, "the need to move towards a new culture and to aim for the highest quality of customer service, which involves taking responsibility for what we do and making the best use of IT resources" and "we are much more customer focused, equipped with up-to-date IT and the whole organisation has been re-engineered and roles redefined". This use of IT to support a changing emphasis on customer service is again an interesting point and supports the contention that the NPM and *Reinventing Government* changes have been facilitated by new technology (Bellamy and Taylor, 1994; Muid, 1994).

(f) Staff Management

Notwithstanding, the comment from the grade 7 that he was unable to spend the time that he would wish to on the development needs of his staff because of increasing work volumes, (a view supported by other middle managers), a total of 8% of managers stated that there had been an increasing emphasis on this aspect of their work. The main driving forces behind this increase in staff management responsibilities were the Investors in People (IiP) initiative and the organisation's HRM strategy that had devolved personnel responsibilities to line managers. The sorts of comments made by the survey respondents on these points are:

> "The way that we do business has changed. Responsibilities for financial and staff management have been delegated down the line management chain"

> "Staff training is better focused and work related under IiP principles"

> "The staff need to have more highly developed interpersonal skills as well as being specialists. I must ensure that they are trained and developed in these areas"

> "More of my work is connected to IiP, for example, my participation in working groups. There have also been changes in the management structure with no central personnel management now. This is done by line managers"

Question 26 on the survey questionnaire asked respondents how IiP had affected their jobs (see Appendix IV). This is a very important area and one which was probed in depth during the follow-up interviews (see Appendix VII for details of the questions asked). The use of IiP as a mechanism to try and link organisational strategy and training strategy in the Civil Service will be explored in depth in chapter 6, and the views of the middle managers interviewed fed into the discussion at that stage. The role of the line manager in discharging his or her staff management responsibilities in departments and agencies is though crucial to the effectiveness of the linking process, and it is interesting to have some initial perceptions as to how the emphasis on that part of the job of middle managers has changed. Other factors mentioned by the survey respondents included more communication with staff and greater team working. One respondent said, "a lot of my work is to do with introducing change in my organisation and keeping staff informed about how it will affect them" whilst others commented that staff were, "encouraged to share ideas and performance in a team based environment" and that, "there is a stronger emphasis on team working and supportive management". The relationship to performance management is clear from these comments and is described under point (h).

(g) Financial Management

As would be expected from the changing business objectives reported by the survey respondents, their jobs had been affected by the requirement for increased financial analysis associated with delegations of budgets and the introduction of resource accounting and budgeting. Middle managers reported:

"The need to deliver more output with less resource, a greater need for team working and increased requirements for financial analysis"

"A move to resource accounting and budgeting and the need to quantify the value of assets"

"I now have increased responsibility for financial management"

"I am more accountable for my budget"

All these observations are in line with the principles of FMI, and the Next Steps agencies and the commercial focus associated with *Competing for Quality* and the Private Finance Initiative.

(h) Performance Management

The key elements of performance management are setting targets and establishing desired performance levels; appraising and improving performance; ensuring continuous learning and development; and giving recognition and rewards (Harrison, 1997, p.224). The overlap with performance measurement and staff management issues is apparent from this description and 8% of survey respondents volunteered that there was an increasing emphasis on this aspect of their work. Although staff appraisal systems are well established in departments and agencies, some reported changes to the procedures as a result of changing business objectives and a continued focus on performance improvement. The move to performance related pay as a reward system was recognised as being an important factor in this respect. The use of reviews to

appraise performance was seen as valuable but the degree of commitment to the frequency varied between the follow-up interviewees. One grade 7 manager commented:

> "We look at job descriptions on a regular basis. I probably do three reviews a year with my team which gives them the opportunity to say what is outdated and what needs to change. The objectives are a mixture of very specific things with specific endings and some more general long term things about, for instance, the quality of briefing. The other thing that I do is that I have quite regular meetings with my team where we look at what we have got coming up in the next week, month, or three months and if necessary we reallocate the work."

This example of good practice contrasts with a more cynical comment from one of the interviewees who said, "we have key work objectives to which we are attached for one year. Everything is about achieving targets so in fact training is regarded as an interruption. The only reason why we do it as far as I can see is to get the IiP." The whole question of training as a tool for performance improvement in the Civil Service will be discussed in depth in the next chapter.

(i) Use of Information Technology

The use of IT as an instrument of change has already been mentioned. A number of survey respondents endorsed the view that changes in their organisations would not have been possible without the introduction of new technology, and that it had had an impact on their jobs. The effects of IT reported by middle managers were that they

were required to use new IT software packages and to make more use of electronic mail, the internet and their own organisation's intranet.

Although not specifically mentioned by the survey respondents, there are also great expectations about the Government Secure Intranet (GSI) (Dudman, 1999, p.34). Dudman advises that eventually the government wants the GSI to be as widely used as the Government Telephone Network (GTN) which is in place in all government departments and agencies. She states that the Cabinet IT Unit is making it possible for procurement to be carried out via the GSI within the overall move towards electronic commerce in government, and there is potential for the network to help civil servants to work across different departmental boundaries. Whilst there remains questions about extra services and security issues, the potential for the GSI in shaping organisational strategy in the future is apparent.

Whilst a total of 6% of the survey respondents volunteered that there had been an increasing use of IT in their jobs as a result of changing business objectives, within the grades from level 7 to HEO, the percentages ranged from 2% to 8%. This raises issues about the impact of IT on the higher management grades which could merit further investigation.

CHAPTER SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A REVIEW OF ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGY

We have seen in this chapter how the drive for efficiency and effectiveness have been key determinants of Civil Service organisational strategy and how this quest for 'more for less' has resulted in downsizing and restructuring. With the number of permanent

civil servants falling by 37% between 1976 and 1998, and more than three-quarter of civil servants working in agencies or on Next Steps lines by that year (Cabinet Office, 1998a, p.6-7) these changes have been fundamental.

The challenge of decentralisation, as was discussed in chapter 1, is developing "integrated and meaningful institutional strategies" at corporate level and developing and maintaining "long-run human resource policies" at unit level (Purcell, 1989, p.90). The fragmentation of the Civil Service into agencies has alarmed some observers who were concerned that the Conservative Government's reforms would threaten the unity of the Service (Fry, 1997). The combined effect of the Conservative policies have led Fry to comment, "it was a long haul, but for the broad mass of civil servants the cumulative effect of this enforced managerialism seems to have been as substantial as it has been resented" (p.708). Concern has also been expressed that downsizing has reduced the opportunities for effective co-ordination of government from within its own ranks (Peters, 1998, p.305). Hoggett (1996, p.28) concludes that the UK public sector as a whole is developing into a high output, low commitment work-culture where "quality counts for far less than quantity". The *Select Committee on the Public Service* (The Stationery Office, 1998, p.65) "received much evidence that the morale of the Civil Service is at present low" and has been affected by perceptions of the lack of job security and future uncertainties. The committee concluded that the devolution of HRM responsibilities "is contributing to a sense of disunity in the Civil Service, and whatever the overall cost, the personnel management cost is bound to be higher" (p.91). The Civil Service is another example of the personnel consequences that can result when business decisions are insufficiently thought through (Bach and Sisson, 2000, p.15).

The comments from middle managers about the impact of changing business objectives on their work tasks, as described in this chapter, do indeed suggest that there has been a degree of "reinvention" in their own job descriptions. We will reflect on the implications of these job changes before moving on to look at what this means for Civil Service training strategy.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF CHANGING JOB DESCRIPTIONS

A job description is "a broad statement of the purpose, scope, responsibilities and tasks that constitute a particular job" (Harrison, 1997, p.258). Harrison explains that the tasks inherent in all jobs comprise three broad components, namely the skills, knowledge and attitudes that are critical to job performance (p.253-254). Changes to tasks will affect the learning needs of individuals, and a process of job training analysis is necessary to identify these learning needs. A definition of job training analysis as supplied by Harrison (p.253) is:

> "The process of identifying the purpose of a job and its component parts, and specifying what must be learnt in order for there to be effective work performance. A key outcome of job training analysis is usually a job training specification which enables learning objectives to be established and appropriate training to be designed".

Increases in volume and diversity of work were the most noticeable changes in job tasks reported by survey respondents. These changes have been accompanied by greater financial and people management responsibilities, and more use of information

technology. The impact of changing business objectives such as those described in this chapter have left managers "to cope in a contingent fashion in the best way that they can" (Bach and Sisson, 2000, p.28). The HR function generally has been affected by organisational developments associated with decentralisation and restructuring (Sisson, 1995, p.75) and this can be seen in the increased delegation of HRM responsibilities to line managers in the Civil Service. These developments bring with them intrinsic problems that have implications for the strategic prospects for HRM (Sisson, 1995, p.74). Although there is now more understanding about the importance of having more coherence and integration of personnel policies and practices, "short-term pressures, both financial and operational, will continue to take their toll" resulting in inconsistent action on behalf of managers (Bach and Sisson, 2000, p.19). The continued lack of organisational recognition about the importance of line management in making the link between organisational strategy and training strategy will be a recurring theme in this case study.

With a business led approach to developing a human resource development (HRD) strategy the focus for training is on the needs that arise from the organisational strategy, operational priorities and key changes in the organisation's environment or its technical base, along with those identified from performance appraisals and succession planning. It is therefore both 'top down' and 'bottom up' (Harrison, 1997, p.38). We will move shortly to look at the attempts made by the Civil Service to apply this approach in its decentralised organisational structure.

Moving on to Training

The training strategy of the Civil Service will be explored in detail in chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis. The research focuses on the training and development needs of middle managers working in departments and agencies that have arisen from their changing job descriptions which have come about as a result of the Civil Service reform agenda. It is accepted that in the same way as the organisational strategy for the Civil Service is evolving, so is the training strategy. The next two chapters will, however, focus on the current training strategy of the Civil Service, feeding in the information provided by middle managers working in departments and agencies about their own training and development needs, and how far these needs have been addressed. In the same way as the research data provides a snapshot of organisational strategy so too is it a view of training strategy at a point in time. Although future training strategy is still unclear at the time of writing this thesis, the views of middle managers provide valuable insights into how training strategy is working on the ground in the Civil Service.

CHAPTER 4

CIVIL SERVICE TRAINING STRATEGY

INTRODUCTION

The last chapter painted the background to the case study in terms of Civil Service reform to arrive at a shared understanding about the organisational strategy, and how this strategy is operating in the decentralised departments and agencies.

For ease of analysis the training strategy of the Civil Service will be examined at two levels: the corporate level at which strategies are initiated; and the unit level where local HRD plans are decided and implemented. This chapter will therefore focus on overall Civil Service training strategy whilst the next chapter will look at how training strategy is working in departments and agencies. We will return to the broader issue of how training strategy links to the wider organisational strategy and objectives in the Civil Service in Chapter 6.

The reasoning behind the approach adopted is the belief that the reader needs to understand how training strategy has been developed and how it works on the ground before moving on to look at the mechanisms designed to try and link training strategy to the wider corporate organisational strategy. We will begin the process outlined by first exploring training as an integral part of HRM strategy.

TRAINING AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF HRM

GETTING THE 'BIG PICTURE'

The development and implementation of HRD strategy is dependent upon a strong framework of HRM policy and systems (Harrison, 1997, p.34). No examination of Civil Service training strategy would therefore be complete without at least some attempt by the researcher to look at the bigger picture of HRM strategy in this case study. Whilst the focus of this chapter is very much on the development and training strategy as outlined in the *Development and Training for Civil Servants* White Paper (HMSO, 1996), in order to answer the specific research question "what is the training strategy", the next sub-section will briefly review HRM strategy in the Civil Service.

The more general question of just how well training strategy is integrated with HRM strategy in the Civil Service is beyond the scope of this thesis, and is an area that could well merit a research project in its own right. This chapter will therefore look at HRM strategy in the Civil Service and where training strategy fits in this "big picture", and move on to explore how training strategies have been developed. The next chapter will use the research findings to examine how training strategy is operating in the decentralised departments and agencies.

A BRIEF REVIEW OF HRM STRATEGY IN THE CIVIL SERVICE

Before embarking immediately on a brief historical review of Civil Service HRM strategy let us first remind ourselves of the key components of HRM and their interconnections. The broad functional areas of HRM most commonly described are resourcing, assessment, reward, training, employee involvement, collective

representation, welfare and equal opportunities, and these areas can be connected in a variety of ways to meet particular organisational needs (Goss, 1994, p.15-17).

Whilst all these areas have been the focus of personnel and HRM strategies in the Civil Service, some key developments have taken place in working patterns, career management and succession planning as part of human resourcing, and there have been changes to recruitment and selection practices, and appraisal and pay and grading systems. Business driven HRM involves a eight step approach whereby organisational HR needs are identified, environmental affects considered, organisational HR assets identified along with initiatives already underway to close the gap between needs and assets, and then revised HRM policies put in place to deliver what is needed to close the remaining gap using plans and programmes for implementation, and evaluation mechanisms for monitoring progress (Hussey, 1996, p.45-48). Whilst the days of manpower planning have passed as a result of rapid changes in business strategies, organisational structures and job descriptions, the shift towards strategic HRM should not be overestimated with processes and the nature of business planning remaining major problems (Sisson and Timperley, 1994, p.180).

Given the comment by Sisson and Timperley it is perhaps unsurprising that the Civil Service should be criticised for its HR policies (Rana, 1999a, p.15). Rana quotes from an interview with Geoff Armstrong, the IPD director-general in which he begins by saying, "the Civil Service is not an HR desert. There are many initiatives that can show the way to areas of the private sector" but Armstrong goes on to be critical of the rigid remuneration and appraisal system which he feels discourages creativity and risk taking, and leads him to the belief that the government will not be able to deliver on its

commitments in the *Modernising Government* White Paper (The Stationery Office, 1999, p.37) without a "behavioural and cultural shift of seismic proportions".

Michael Bichard, the permanent secretary at the Department for Education and Employment, has also been critical of the reward system in the Civil Service (Bichard, 1999, p.37). He states, "pay is only one – albeit very important – part of a complete reward package that we should develop to get the best out of our people". And on equal opportunities and career development he says, "there are still too few women in senior positions, particularly at the very top. We are also a long way indeed from reflecting the ethnic diversity of society at the top level" and he adds, "we also have to find better ways to allow the talented people who are already working in the service to develop. We need to bring on our most effective performers quickly and give people at all levels plenty of scope to make a real difference to what we do and the way that we do it".

In order to examine in more detail these apparent weaknesses in HRM strategy in the Civil Service, this sub-section will briefly examine four main areas of HRM namely recruitment and selection, pay and grading, working patterns, and career management and succession planning to add a historical perspective to the policies under review. These areas will be numbered (i) to (iv) respectively in the discussion that follows. The next sub-section will then focus specifically on development and training as a key component of HRM.

(i) Recruitment and Selection

Government policy on recruitment to the Civil Service is that it should be on merit by fair and open competition (Cabinet Office, 1991a, p.20). Whilst departments and

agencies are free to determine and satisfy their own requirements, the Office of the Civil Service Commissioners gives approval for senior appointments and advises on rules governing recruitment and selection generally, and the Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency (RAS) offers recruitment and related services to departments and agencies on a repayment basis (p.20 – 21). The rules and procedures for recruitment must conform with the *Civil Service Commissioners' Code* published in 1995 (The Stationery Office, 1998, p.33). The Chief Executive of the RAS is a Civil Service Commissioner (Cabinet Office, 1991a, p.21).

The origins of Civil Service HRM strategy on recruitment can be traced back to the Fulton Report (HMSO, 1968) which stated that, "employing departments should have a larger role in recruitment and there should be a speeding up of procedures" (p.105). The report added that, "while the Civil Service should remain predominantly a career Service, there should be greater mobility between it and other employments. We, therefore, recommend an expanded late entry, temporary appointments for fixed periods, short-term interchanges of staff and freer movement out of the Service" (p.105).

Staff in the Senior Civil Service are now increasingly being recruited by open competition and all agency Chief Executives are appointed on personal contracts for limited terms which may be renewed (The Stationery Office, 1998, p.32). Open competition and personal short term contracts are also beginning to be used throughout the rest of the Civil Service (p.33). Job specific selection based on advertised vacancies is now common practice in departments and agencies. In the Cabinet Office, for example, there is a policy of advertising all vacancies at Grade 6 and below within the

department in a Weekly Vacancy Notice. This policy has become known as the Job Advertising Scheme with the aim of giving individuals working in the Cabinet Office the responsibility for influencing their own job moves whilst at the same time allowing managers to recruit the most suitable job applicants for their vacancies. Schemes like this one, however, have been criticised for mitigating against horizontal and lateral developmental moves with preference given to applicants who already hold the competences being sought. This was a view which was strongly expressed by middle managers interviewed as part of the follow-up interviews in the research project.

Departments which recruit to the administrative fast stream operate as a consortium under the leadership of the Cabinet Office (The Stationery Office, 1998, p.33). Of the 29,000 people who join the Civil Service each year, about 300 graduates enter through the various recruitment competitions for the Fast Stream Development Programme (Cabinet Office, 1999b). Fast streamers have the opportunity for accelerated promotion, changing jobs every 12 to 18 months. A *Review of Fast Stream Recruitment* (Cabinet Office, 1994a) recommended amongst other things that the scheme "should be renamed the Policy Management Programme, and that those recruited on to it should be called Trainees in Policy Management" (p.35) and that the responsibility for determining their pay and grading and training should rest with the departments (p.42 and p.52).

The research methodology underpinning the review has been criticised as has the lack of appreciation about its impact on attitudes in British society (Chapman, 1994). To quote Chapman, he says:

> "Britain is class-conscious, and unless it changes there will always be criticism levelled at apparently elitist universities and the recruitment of potential high fliers to interesting jobs. This is a matter for education and social change as much as for Civil Service recruitment. Of course the two are linked and the problem is not easy to solve, but there is no mention of this in the Fast Stream Report" (p.608).

There has been increasing scepticism about so called "high-flyer" or "fast-track" programmes in management development generally which have been criticised as being mainly an instrument for individual and personal career development rather than contributing to organisational competence, learning and change (Larsen, 1997, p.310). There is clearly an overlap between recruitment and selection, and career management and succession planning, and we will return to this question under that heading and again in Chapter 6 which looks at organisational strategy and training strategy linking mechanisms used in this case study.

(ii) Pay and Grading

Since 1996, departments and agencies have been responsible for their own pay and grading arrangements and have been involved in introducing their own systems (The Stationery Office, 1998, p.32). The first steps towards decentralisation began with separate negotiations between the Treasury and the Civil Service unions with five separate agreements implemented in 1987 (Elliott, 1995, p.48). The Efficiency Unit report on *Improving Management in Government: The Next Steps* (Efficiency Unit, 1988), acknowledged that over the previous 5 years there had been a move towards open reporting in appraisal based on reviewing performance against personal objectives,

and the development of performance-related pay, and a unified grading structure down to Grade 7 level (p.23). The agencies established under the Next Steps initiative were, however, initially slower than expected in seeking freedoms to develop their own pay arrangements (Goldsworthy, 1991, p.32).

The Citizens Charter (HMSO, 1991) looked to see much more of a link between pay, performance and quality of service in the public sector with a drive towards greater delegation and flexibility in the Civil Service (p.35). Building on this approach *Competing for Quality* (Treasury, 1991) stated that, "releasing resources through the successful application of competition should be an important factor, among others, in determining performance pay" (p.5). *Continuity and Change* (HMSO, 1994) proposed the further delegation of responsibility for pay and grading below senior levels to all departments and agencies by 1 April 1996 (p.2).

One anticipated consequence of a decentralised pay structure in the Civil Service was increasing inequalities and wider pay variations (Elliott, 1995, p.50). This view has been supported by middle managers interviewed in the research project. A quote from one middle manager working in Personnel in an agency sums up the views expressed by others:

> "In the old days when we were governed by the pay and conditions of service code there was a very important notion in the Civil Service of equity. You could not appoint somebody into a grade on a pay point which exceeded the pay point of their new colleagues around them. It was a situation which on the one hand felt fair to existing staff but on the

other hand rather fettered the service in achieving the people they wanted at the price they could afford to pay".

Some of the freedoms enjoyed by agencies to adapt their pay systems to meet their particular needs are also summed up by the same middle manager who said,

"We have done other things to our pay which other departments and agencies have not done. We were very aware that differentials between the grades, particularly higher grades, had become eroded. So we restored those differentials and in doing so we shortened the pay ranges. For example, the Grade 7 pay range in the Service has characteristically been extremely long and if people get on at the bottom it might take them more than the rest of their career to reach the top. That is very, very disheartening. Our Grade 7 minimum is a lot higher than many departments in the Service. We also use accelerated progression as well".

Performance related pay has been a feature of Civil Service pay arrangements since 1988 and has been implemented alongside changes to grading structures with pay bands replacing grades (The Stationery Office, 1998, p.33). The Cabinet Office has set up a working group to examine the use of performance-related pay in the Civil Service, following criticism that it is unfair and ineffectual as a motivator (Thatcher, 1999, p.9). Research into pay systems in the Inland Revenue, NHS and the Employment Service revealed that less than 20% of public sector employees thought that it had been an incentive for them to change (McHale, 1999, p.12).

(iii) Working Patterns

A report on *Working Patterns* was produced by the Management and Personnel Office (MPO) in the Cabinet Office in December 1987 (Mueller, 1987). The study recommended ten steps which could be taken to encourage more flexible working arrangements in the Civil Service including the introduction of three new working patterns; recurring temporary contracts, nil-hours contracts and annual hours contracts, and the extension of three working patterns already in use associated with part-time working. period contracts and homeworking (Mueller, 1987, para 7.1). Although the report argued that these changes would allow for better use of new technology, more flexibility and an increased capacity to adapt to new demands in the labour market, none of the executive agencies have moved that far in the direction of the working practices laid down in the report (McDonald, 1992, p.51). There have, however, been changes, particularly with the number of part-time civil servants which has increased from a total of 23,617 non-industrial staff at 1 January 1987 (Treasury, 1987, p.21) to 56,850 at 1 April 1998 (Cabinet Office, 1998a, p.40). Similarly, the number of casual staff has risen from 12,000 in 1987 to 18,000 in 1998 (Cabinet Office, 1998a, p.49).

(iv) Career Management and Succession Planning

The White Paper, *The Civil Service: Continuity and Change* (HMSO, 1994), had its origins in the widely publicised Oughton Report from the Efficiency Unit (Chapman, 1994). The Oughton Report on the Efficiency Unit's *Career Management and Succession Planning Study* (Cabinet Office, 1993) was commissioned in July 1992 with terms of reference:

> "To consider, in the light of the changing structures and job needs of the Civil Service, the policies and practices for ensuring the adequate supply of suitably qualified people able to fill senior posts in both Agencies/Executives and Departmental headquarters (whether from internal sources or by direct recruitment after Open Competition), and to make recommendations to the Head of the Home Civil Service" (p.85).

The recommendations that were subsequently contained in *Continuity and Change* (HMSO, 1994) have already been discussed and the point made that of all the White Papers this one, together with its successor *Taking Forward Continuity and Change* (HMSO, 1995), articulate the organisational strategy for the Civil Service. Clearly though they also spell out the HRM strategy for the senior Civil Service in terms of career management, succession planning and filling senior posts. The challenging issue of career management for other grades was addressed in the White Paper *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996) and will be referred to again in the next sub-section which looks at training and development as a key component of HRM. The issue will then be explored in detail in Chapter 6 when the linking mechanisms contained in the White Paper are both described and evaluated.

FOCUS ON DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING: THE WHITE PAPER

Of all the components included in HRM, development and training is the one area in the Civil Service that has merited a White Paper all to itself. Published in 1996, the White Paper *Development and Training for Civil Servants: A Framework for Action* (HMSO) spells out the training and development strategy for the Civil Service (p.3).

If training is to add value in an organisation it needs to take place within a strategic framework which involves balancing current and future business needs and providing a service based on the main organisational priorities (Holbeche, 1999a). This balancing act, according to Holbeche, requires answering five main questions concerned with, "what are we going to do and why?"; "who is involved?"; "how are we going to achieve what we are trying to achieve?"; "how will we build flexibility into our plans so that we can respond to needs that emerge?"; and "how will we know we've arrived?"(p.17). As the balance of needs may change she sees strategising as a continuous rather than a one-off process and states that training strategies need to be flexible enough to address issues that are relevant to both the organisation and the individual.

Development and Training for Civil Servants (HMSO, 1996) was written as a result of *Continuity and Change* (HMSO, 1994) which articulated the organisational strategy for the Civil Service as described in the previous chapter. Its strategic purpose, (Holbeche's (1999a) "what are we going to do and why?") was to try and ensure that the Civil Service was equipped and trained to meet the challenge of *Continuity and Change* (HMSO, 1994) by developing the managerial, technical and numeracy skills of civil servants, and deepening their understanding of scientific and technological issues (HMSO, 1996, p.2).

Given its decentralised organisational structure, the Civil Service was required to involve its departments and agencies in this training strategy and these organisations were asked to "carry forward their own plans to improve their investment in training and development in accordance with their own organisational needs" and "produce by 1

November 1996 their own action plans for implementing the approach set out in this White Paper" (p.3). This continuing programme for action on training and development across the Civil Service has three key elements:

- a commitment to the Investors in People standard with the target that by the year 2000 all civil servants will be employed in organisations recognised as Investors in People
- a new drive to raise the levels of skills and awareness of staff at all levels across the Civil Service
- and giving individual civil servants more confidence and ability to be responsible for their own development and careers (p.3-6).

Whilst recognising that finding the human and financial resources for training and developing civil servants "is not easy at a time of tightening running cost controls and reducing managerial teams" the White Paper nonetheless requires that "investment in the training and development of staff should be seen as a priority for departments and agencies" (p.6). To this end, Cabinet Office has been made responsible for reviewing overall progress against the objectives set out in the White Paper (p.8).

As we saw in Chapter 1, developing and implementing training strategies is made more complex in divisionalised organisational structures. "Changes in the internal structure of organisations have been wide ranging and fundamental" with one of most common developments being divisionalisation (Sisson, 1995, p.64). Sisson sees this development, and that of devolved budgeting and the growth of internal markets, as posing serious questions about an organisation's ability to develop and maintain a

strategic response to HRM (p.75) and this was discussed in the summary and conclusions section of Chapter 3. It is reiterated here because it is an extremely important point and one that will be explored in more detail when the mechanisms chosen by the Civil Service to try and link training strategy to organisational strategy are examined. These mechanisms, namely Investors in People, raising levels of skills and awareness, and managing development and careers will be described and evaluated in Chapter 6. However, given the challenge posed to training strategy by the decentralisation of the Civil Service into departments and agencies as a result of the *Improving Management in Government: The Next Steps* initiative (Efficiency Unit, 1988), the next section of this chapter will describe training strategy in the Civil Service pre and post Next Steps to better understand how it has evolved over the period.

A STEP CHANGE IN TRAINING STRATEGY

TRAINING STRATEGY PRE-NEXT STEPS

A report on *Civil Service Training* (Heaton and Williams, 1974) stated that the majority of Civil Service training at that time was arranged departmentally (p.9). To quote, "nearly 70% is conducted in departments either at the desk or on formal courses; it includes induction training for new entrants, training in specific skills and techniques, supervisory training and job-related management training". Heaton and Williams' (1974) six main recommendations were that:

- training should become less isolated from mainstream work by the "explicit commitment of senior management and the increased involvement of line management"
- training and personnel management functions should be brought closer together

- more good quality staff should be assigned to training in both departments and the Civil Service College (CSC)
- the CSC should improve its organisation and forge closer links with departments
- the Civil Service Department should ensure that there is a training strategy for the Civil Service as a whole and it should be equipped to give more positive and expert leadership
- and the Civil Service should adopt a more professional approach to training with a greater emphasis on quality (p.30).

In the same way as it is interesting to reflect how far the recommendations of the Fulton Report (HMSO, 1968) have been encapsulated in subsequent Civil Service reforms so too can some of the Heaton and Williams themes be seen in later initiatives, not least the *Development and Training for Civil Servants* White Paper (HMSO, 1996) and the recent review of the Civil Service College (Cabinet Office, 1998e). The Fulton Report (HMSO, 1968) recommendations have been described in the last chapter on organisational strategy and some of the most important ones relate to training, in particular the establishment of the Civil Service College and greater professionalism among specialists and administrators (p.105).

One of the early tasks of the Management and Personnel Office (MPO) was to review the central selection, training and career management of civil servants to ensure that they had the required financial skills demanded by the Financial Management Initiative (FMI); to encourage younger staff to deepen their specialisms and to spend some time doing operational work; manage the careers of potential senior managers to help them to gain greater depth of knowledge about particular aspects of departmental work;

broaden in mid-career the skills of others with potential to give them wider insights; and increase the number of short-term exchanges and secondments and early retirements (HMSO, 1982, p.19).

Most departments maintained that they had recognised the need for financial skills before the White Paper on *Efficiency and Effectiveness in the Civil Service* (HMSO, 1982) was launched and that they had either conducted some form of awareness training or included it in their general management courses (Treasury and Cabinet Office, 1985, p.5). The report on *Identifying the Need for Financial Skills* (Treasury and Cabinet Office, 1985) was, however, critical of the absence of a planned approach to training in financial skills in departments with an emphasis on skills provision rather than training needs analysis (p.4). In line with the Heaton and Williams' recommendation about senior management commitment to training (1974, p.30), the review (Treasury and Cabinet Office, 1985) identified the need for top management support and involvement in the development of financial skills (p.5). The review team found though that, "in many cases this interest appeared to be transitory with no obvious involvement in monitoring progress and the effect on the department's work" (p.5).

Apart from the main restructuring recommendation contained in the Efficiency Unit's report (Efficiency Unit, 1988) which established the Next Steps agencies, the report also identified another priority which was that, "the management of each department must ensure that their staff have the relevant experience and skills needed to do the tasks that are essential to effective government" (p.7). The report stated that the establishment of agencies for government services had implications for the functions and organisation of departments and that, "its success depends critically on the people

working in departments and the skills they bring to the task" and went on to recommend that:

> "Departments ensure that their staff are properly trained and experienced in the delivery of services whether within or outside central government; the staff will then be in a position to develop and interpret government policy and manage the agencies in a way that can maximise results" (p.12).

Given subsequent developments in HRM policy for Civil Service senior managers another quote from the report is worth making:

> "It is most important that there should not be two classes of people in departments – those in agencies and those at the centre. The aim must be to have senior managers who at more junior levels have had substantial experience of the skills and practical reality of management as well as effective experience of the political and policy aspects of work in a department" (p.12).

The same themes then can be seen to be coming through all the training strategy documents prior to decentralisation of the Civil Service, namely the need for well trained, professional staff able to deliver departmental objectives. One of the line managers interviewed as part of the follow-up interviews in the research project sums up the situation perfectly:

"We have always wanted good managers, we have always wanted flexible people, people who are outward looking, who have high standards. We have always wanted people who manage people well; we have always striven for it but we have still not delivered it. So I don't know what we can do that is different...."

The interviewee went on to say:

"It is difficult talking to me about this because I have always taken the view that people have to be better at managing. In the Civil Service we have placed far too much emphasis on policy making and intellectual skills at the expense of management skills. It is my view that we need both".

This of course mirrors some of the thinking behind the Next Steps initiative.

TRAINING STRATEGY POST NEXT STEPS

The decentralisation of the Civil Service into executive agencies as a result of the Next Steps initiative has undoubtedly had an impact on established departmental arrangements for management development which is an intrinsic problem associated with changes in organisational structure (Sissons, 1995, p.75). The *Continuity and Change* White Paper (HMSO, 1994) stated that, "over the last six years the Next Steps initiative has fundamentally altered the way in which the Civil Service is managed. A key task for the mid-1990s is to complete this programme" (p.13). Whilst accepting that "there is no single blueprint for success in every organisation" and, "responsibility

for developing a managerial culture and improving the quality of skills of staff must rest ultimately with departments and agencies themselves" (p.35), the White Paper made several recommendations (p.3-4) based on the Efficiency Unit's report on *Career Management and Succession Planning* (Cabinet Office, 1993) concerning the senior Civil Service which have already been discussed. The Government's response to the Fifth Report from the Treasury and Civil Service Committee, *The Role of the Civil Service*, House of Commons (Session 1993-94), which was incorporated into *The Civil Service: Taking Forward Continuity and Change* White Paper (HMSO, 1995), stated that the government expected that the creation of the senior Civil Service would have significant implications for training and development strategy (p.42).

Whilst the training strategy of the Civil Service is currently still encapsulated in the *Development and Training for Civil Servants* White Paper (HMSO, 1996), a new corporate training and development strategy is in the process of being developed by Cabinet Office. The last section of this chapter will look at some of the emerging thoughts coming out of this project. Before moving to this, however, we will focus on the Labour Government's policy initiatives on training strategy as described in the *Modernising Government* White Paper (The Stationery Office, 1999).

MODERNISING THE CIVIL SERVICE

Modernising the Civil Service is an integral part of the *Modernising Government* White Paper (The Stationery Office, 1999) and we took a first look in the last chapter at the implications for organisational strategy from the new Labour Government agenda for the Civil Service. Although clearly a White Paper aimed primarily at organisational issues, contained within this weighty document are some key messages for Civil

Service training strategy. For the wider public service the White Paper (The Stationery Office, 1999, p.56) states:

> "The public service must become a learning organisation. It needs to learn from its past successes and failures. It needs constantly to benchmark itself against the best, wherever that is found. Staff must be helped to learn new skills throughout their careers".

More specifically for the Civil Service it adds,

> "All parts of the public sector have National Training Organisations apart from the Civil Service. We have applied to establish a Central Government National Training Organisation to develop and maintain a corporate strategy for training and development" (p.57).

Some of the other HRM issues addressed in the White Paper, namely performance management, bringing in and bringing on talent, and diversity (p.56-60) are being addressed by the Permanent Secretary working groups (Cabinet Office, 1999a) as previously mentioned. It should be clear to the reader that in the same way that Civil Service organisational strategy is evolving rapidly, so too is the training strategy. The point therefore is made again here that the data obtained from middle managers working in departments and agencies in this case study must be regarded as a snapshot of the situation at a point in time. Indeed, there has been academic observation that, "the early policies of the Labour Government are consistent with a small, but significant, shift towards bureaucracy as defined by public choice theory" (Boyne, 1998,

p.49). Notwithstanding this perceived shift, the research findings in this case study remain valuable and are of interest to the Civil Service and other decentralised organisations as they continue to grapple with the challenges of linking organisational strategy and training strategy in their organisational structures.

The background to the *Modernising Government* White Paper (The Stationery Office, 1999) is itself steeped in the question of divisionalisation as Dr David Clark MP, the then Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, said in a keynote address on *Better Government* (unpublished) at a Civil Service College conference on *The Shifting Boundaries of Government* in February 1998. In the words of Dr Clark:

> "We have accepted that many improvements have been undertaken by our predecessors. We inherit a fair share of potential, but a fair share of problems.... and as a politician I realise that as soon as you solve one problem you create another problem.... and we have decided that in the name of efficiency and better value for money that we crudely would empower our civil servants. ....So in essence we have created huge silos of power....what we found lacking is anything horizontal which stretches across these huge silos of power and it means it's quite difficult to co-ordinate activity and co-ordinate action".

This view corresponds with that of other people in government elsewhere who express concern about the loss of informal mechanisms for co-ordination associated with the "denigration of the public service and down-sizing governments" (Peters, 1998, p.305). Peter's point is that down-sizing is itself reducing opportunities for movement within

government and that as a result people remain in post longer, and the vision of government narrows according. He adds:

> "Further, the increasing technical content of most programmes means that greater expertise is required, and individual civil servants may have fewer fungible skills usable in other settings" (p.305).

Peter's (1998) observations are reflected in the views of some middle managers about their development prospects as we shall see in subsequent chapters. The parallels with Sisson's (1995, p.75) comments about the effect of organisational structure changes on HRM should also be apparent here.

A NEW CORPORATE TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

THE PROPOSED CENTRAL GOVERNMENT NATIONAL TRAINING ORGANISATION

The *Modernising Government* White Paper (The Stationery Office, 1999, p.57) committed the Civil Service to developing a new corporate strategy for training and development to be taken forward by the proposed Central Government National Training Organisation (CGNTO). Whilst we have already discussed some of the messages that have come out of the White Paper, there are also a number of other issues which will have implications for training and development. The Cabinet Office as the corporate centre of the Civil Service is currently considering the areas where skills will have to be improved as a result of the new ways of working, and how the training strategy outlined in the *Development and Training for Civil Servants* White Paper (HMSO, 1996) should be updated to take account of these new skills and cultural

requirements. The revised terms of reference for the CGNTO "shadow" council as stated in an internal Cabinet Office memorandum are:

> "To develop and promote corporate training, development and learning strategies, and to be the voice of the Home Civil Service on all such matters. To be increasingly influential, through effective partnerships, in helping to raise standards in training, development and learning in the Home Civil Service. To spearhead the development of skills and the acquisition of knowledge to meet the business needs of the Home Civil Service. To work towards making a reality the Government's commitment for the Home Civil Service to be a Learning Organisation".

The first National Training Organisations (NTOs) were recognised by the Government in July 1997 to address the education and training interests of employers in different industries and occupational groups (Hoare and Jolly, 1999, p.45). They have an important role to play in identifying national labour market trends and addressing skills shortages (Powell, 1999, p.43). There are six strategic aims to complement the terms of reference of the CGNTO. At the time of the launch of the NTOs they were credited as contributing to a transition in labour market management with new opportunities for companies and HR professionals to become involved in public policy-making (Pickard, 1998, p.43). It will be interesting to observe the impact of the CGNTO on development and training strategy in the Civil Service.

THE CIVIL SERVICE MANAGEMENT BOARD

Incorporated in the CGNTO strategic plan will be the commitments from the *Modernising Government* (The Stationery Office, 1999) agenda, and the reports on Civil Service management issues by the Civil Service Management Committee sub-groups which were described in Chapter 3 of this thesis. Proposals from the reports of the Permanent Secretary-led working groups were considered by the Civil Service Management Committee (since renamed the Civil Service Management Board) at their meeting at the Civil Service College in Sunningdale at the end of September 1999 (Cabinet Office, 1999c). It is clear that their thoughts on "bringing in and bringing on talent", "vision and common principles", "diversity", "performance management", and "communication and change management" and "accountability and incentives" will have an impact on HRM and HRD strategy. A growing number of organisations are moving towards unifying their decentralised business units, "bringing together different sections of the business by developing shared values and common employment practices, but without necessarily changing their structures" (Arkin, 1999, p.34) although "recentralisation is the trend that dare not speak its name" (p.37).

The *Message to the Civil Service from the Civil Service Management Committee* (Cabinet Office, 1999c) said about the Sunningdale meeting that:

> "We agreed that the Civil Service must have a clear sense of direction, purpose and values. These will be the common framework for our organisations' own efforts. We must be better at joined-up thinking".

The Centre for Management and Policy Studies and the Civil Service College will need to respond to the culture change inherent in these new ways of working by developing training programmes to help deliver the new behaviours that will be required of managers. The key components of HRM as described by Goss (1994, p.15) will also be affected by the new agenda; it will be interesting to see how integrated these components are when the precise nature of the future direction is clearer.

CHAPTER SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The training strategy of the Civil Service has been reviewed at corporate level in this chapter along with a brief historical perspective of four other main areas of HRM strategy (recruitment and selection, pay and grading, working patterns, and career management and succession planning). We have noted the piecemeal way in which human resource policies have been introduced, and the recent criticisms of Civil Service HRM strategy. The attempts by the Labour Government to begin to address these human resource weaknesses in the *Modernising Government* White Paper (The Stationery Office, 1999) have also been briefly described. Research studies suggest that the integration or matching of HRM strategy with corporate and business strategies is "at best a lengthy, complex and iterative process and, at worse, that there is little evidence to suggest that widespread integration is achieved" (Legge, 1995, p.124). The evidence from the case study so far would lend support to this pessimistic observation by Legge (1995).

This chapter, however, has focused specifically on the training strategy of the Civil Service as an integral part of HRM, and in particular on the development and training policies outlined in *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996). We

have seen how this White Paper was written as a result of *Continuity and Change* (HMSO, 1994) which spelt out the organisational strategy of the Civil Service. In Purcell's (1989, p.70-71) terms therefore *Continuity and Change* (HMSO, 1994) contained the "'upstream' first-order decisions" concerned with the long-term direction of the Civil Service whilst the policies outlined in *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996) may be described as "more downstream". To make the point about the difficulties of linking organisational strategy and training strategy in the decentralised departments and agencies, the training strategy of the Civil Service has been described before and after the introduction of *The Next Steps* initiative (Efficiency Unit, 1988).

The external and internal integration of HRM policies is problematic with potential contradictions arising between integrating HR strategy and business strategy, and the ability to achieve an integrated organisation-wide HRM policy, in decentralised organisational structures (Legge, 1995, p.130). The precise nature of the challenge of decentralisation has been discussed in previous chapters. This chapter has briefly described some of the freedoms that departments and agencies have enjoyed post Next Steps to decide how they will improve the skills of their staff. We have taken a first look at the attempt by the Civil Service to link organisational strategy and training strategy in *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996), followed by more recent initiatives to develop a new corporate strategy to be taken forward by the proposed CGNTO.

In the next chapter we will shift to a more local level of analysis to explore in more detail how Civil Service training strategy is operating on the ground in the decentralised departments and agencies.

CHAPTER 5

TRAINING STRATEGY IN DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES

DEVELOPING HRD STRATEGY ON THE GROUND

THE BUSINESS-LED APPROACH

The business-led approach to HRD strategy development as described by Harrison (1997, p.37-38) has previously been mentioned in the last section of Chapter 3. The Civil Service training strategy as outlined in *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996) reflects the business-led approach, with HRD strategy initiated at corporate level, and influenced by the business strategy. Key decisions about HRD needs and strategy are then communicated to business unit managers who decide on HRD targets and plans for their own units in order to ensure effective performance and an adequate contribution to meeting corporate goals (Harrison, 1997, p.38). Harrison (1997) describes five steps in producing HRD plans at unit level which involves:

- focusing on corporate goals and the units business targets for the following year
- identifying group and individual gaps in skill, knowledge and attitudes in the unit that it is essential to close in order to meet the targets
- agreeing on HRD plans to meet the standards that are to be achieved to close the gaps
- setting specific objectives for every component of the plans
- and monitoring HRD regularly, making adjustments where necessary (p.42).

Having reviewed and explored Civil Service corporate training strategy in Chapter 4 this chapter will seek to explain how training strategy is operating in the decentralised departments and agencies and how far the steps involved in producing HRD plans are being adopted locally. We will begin this process by feeding in some research findings about how training strategies are developed in practice in departments and agencies, using the views of middle managers working in these organisations to gain valuable insights into how HRD strategy is being formulated on the ground in this case study.

TRAINING STRATEGY IN PRACTICE

Development and Training for Civil Servants (HMSO, 1996) contained a recognition that "at a practical level, it is for the hundreds of organisations that make up the Civil Service to carry forward their own plans to improve the investment in training and development in accordance with their own organisational needs" (p.3). Whilst therefore setting the development and training strategy for the Civil Service, the White Paper established that the departments and agencies were responsible for the delivery of that strategy, and required them to produce their own strategy action plans. It also encouraged them in drawing up their plans to formulate proposals for evaluating their training and development activity, and to benchmark their performance against other organisations both inside and outside the Civil Service (p.7). The focus groups held with the middle managers in 1997 came on the back of this process and participants spoke about the training strategies that were being developed in their own organisations:

> "Every directorate head is being asked to come up with a training strategy for their directorate....a bottom up approach....based on individual's perceptions of their needs in discussion with their line manager"

We see in this quote what Harrison (1997, p.39) describes as the comprehensive approach to setting HRD strategy where diagnosis of needs are obtained from departmental or functional managers across an organisation and it is agreed with them those to which HRD can offer an appropriate and efficient answer. Harrison's conclusion that, "today, it is the business-led approach that tends to be the dominating model in establishing the needs to be met by HRD in the organisation" (p.37) mirrors the Civil Service corporate experience with the *Development and Training for Civil Servants* White Paper (HMSO, 1996) developed as a result of the organisational strategy as articulated in *Continuity and Change* (HMSO, 1994). In the next chapter we will look in depth at the mechanisms selected to try and link departmental and agency training strategies to the corporate training strategy and in turn to the organisational strategy of the Civil Service.

Given the importance of *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996) on the departmental and agency training strategies, and on the training and development received by middle managers working in these decentralised organisations, question 27 on the survey questionnaire asked the respondents if they were aware of the White Paper (see Appendix IV). Their responses are shown at figure 5.1.

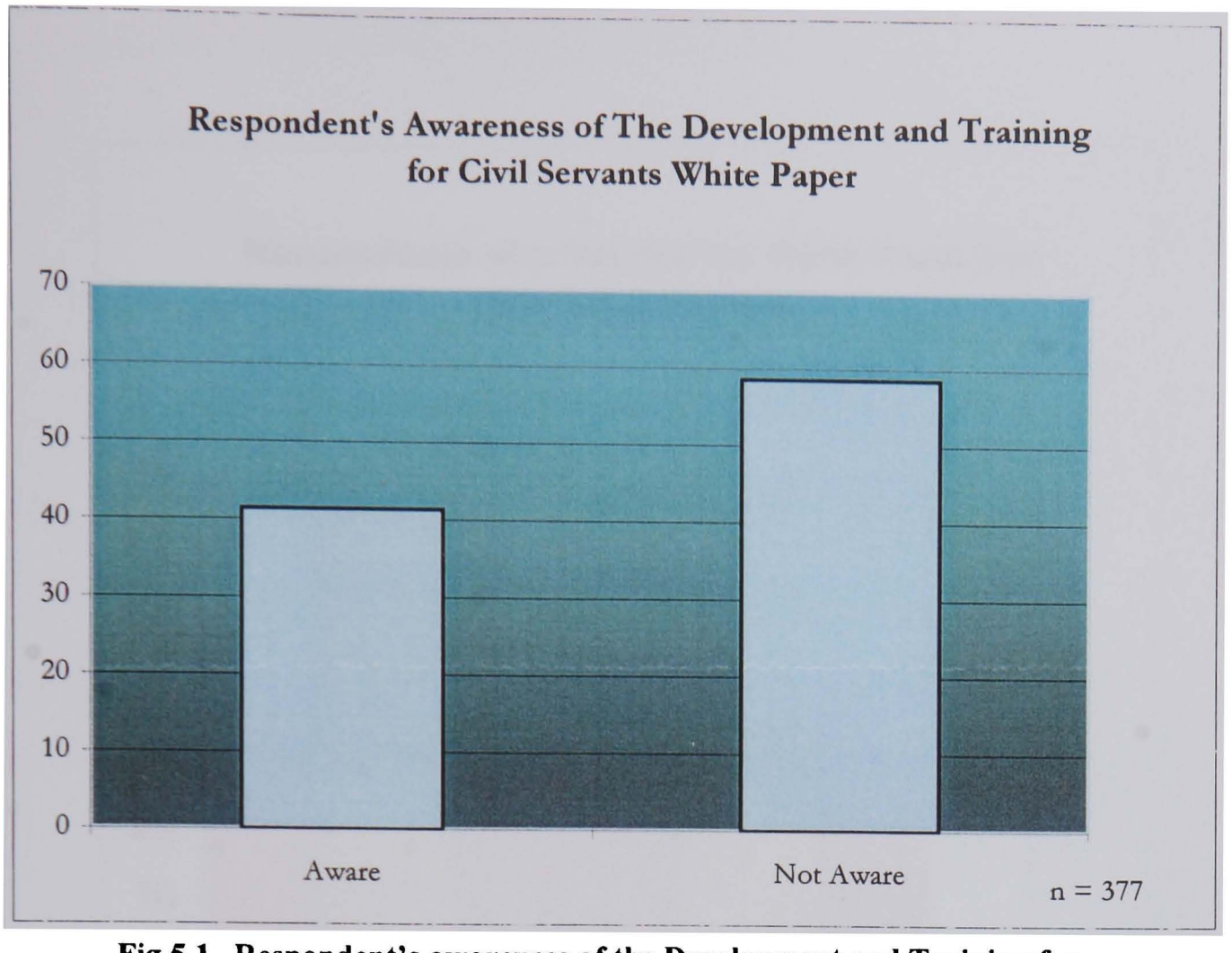


Fig 5.1 Respondent's awareness of the Development and Training for Civil Servants White Paper

It can be seen from this figure that nearly 60% (58.6%) of respondents were not aware of the White Paper. This is more than a little surprising given the importance of this strategy document and the messages that it contains for civil servants about self-development and career management. The question remains how managers can respond positively to the strategy when they are unaware of its contents. To further probe the willingness of managers to listen to the messages in the strategy document, another question was asked about the relevance of the White Paper to the survey respondents (question 28). These responses are given at figure 5.2.

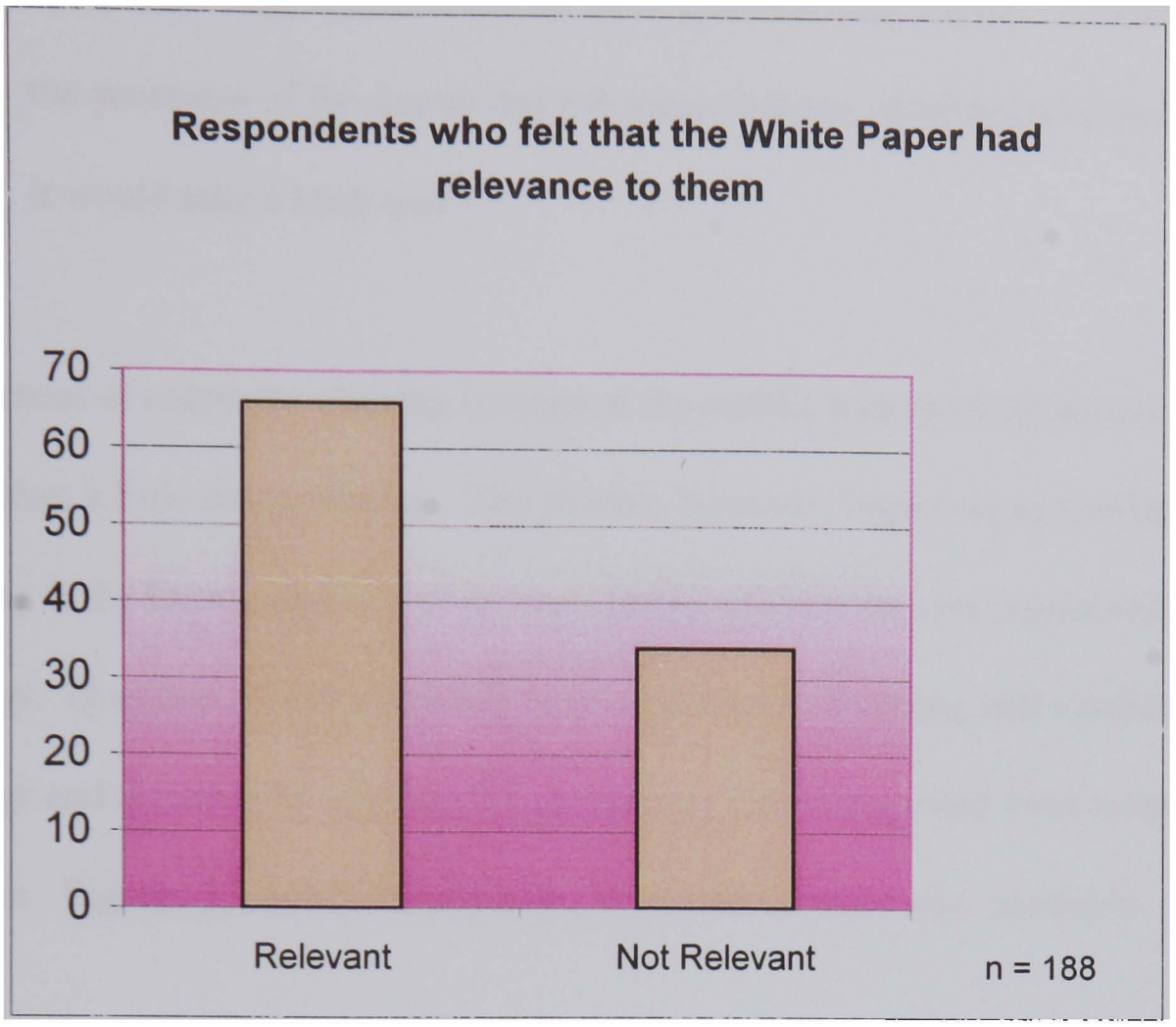


Fig 5.2 Respondents who felt that the White Paper had relevance to them

Whilst two thirds of respondents felt that it was relevant to them, and some people had a good grasp of its contents and what the strategy meant for their own training and development, others were less well informed. Some of the comments from the survey respondents are interesting:

"To be honest I cannot remember what it says"

"I don't see the local commitment to it"

"I am aware of it but not of the detail"

"Seen but forgotten"

"My department is not prepared to put the money in"

"I cannot remember what is in it let alone have time to read it

and receive support for putting it into practice"

"I have not read it so it could be more relevant than I think. Whatever, the pressures of the day-to-day job mean that any recommendations from it would take a back seat"

Awareness of corporate training strategy at the middle management grades is therefore more than a little disappointing. The picture, however, improves somewhat when looking at the knowledge of survey respondents about their own organisation's training strategy. Question 29 asked them if their department or agency had a training strategy and question 30 whether the contents of the strategy had been communicated to them. Figures 5.3 and 5.4 analyse the responses to these two questions.

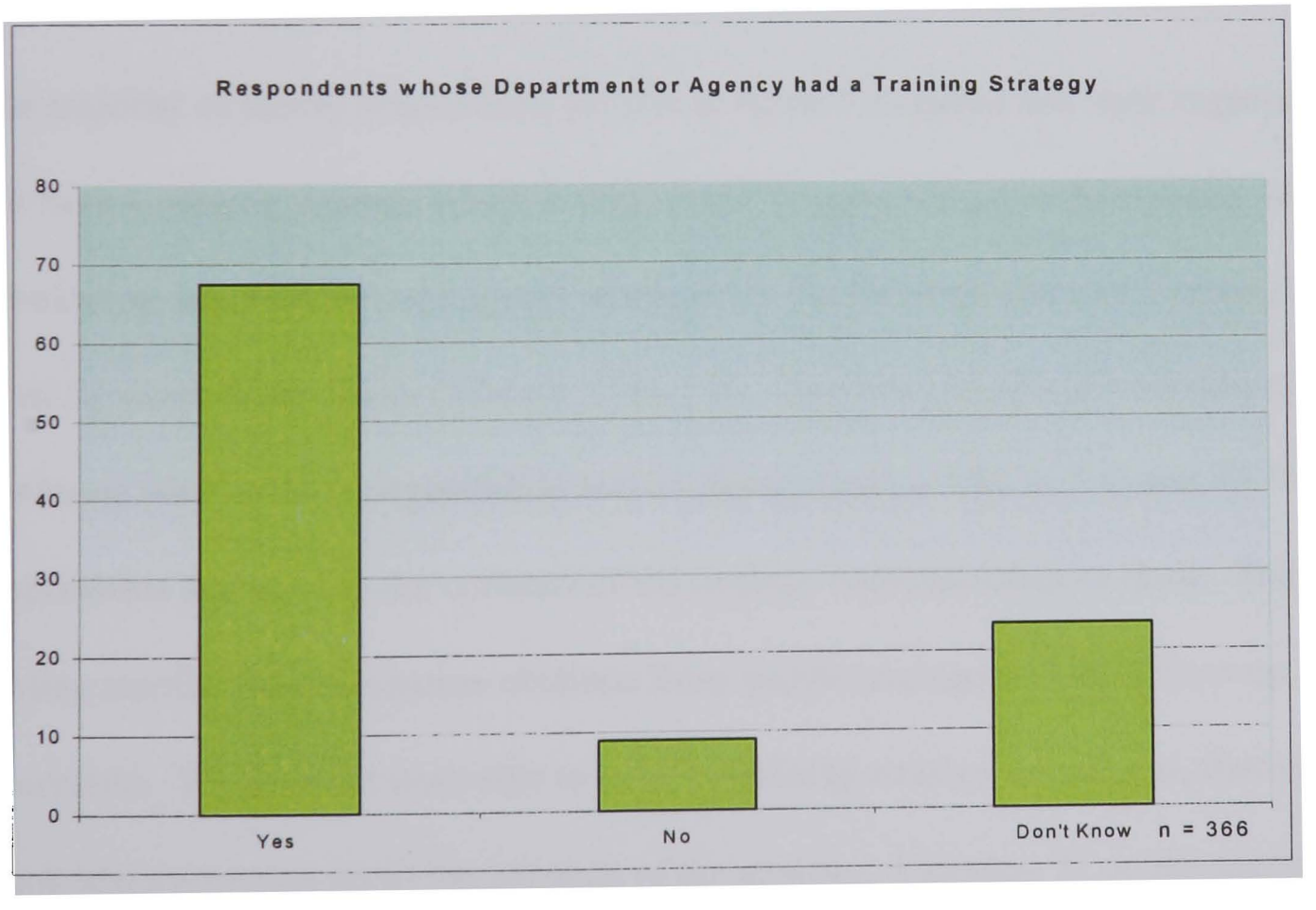


Fig 5.3 Respondents whose department or agency had a training strategy

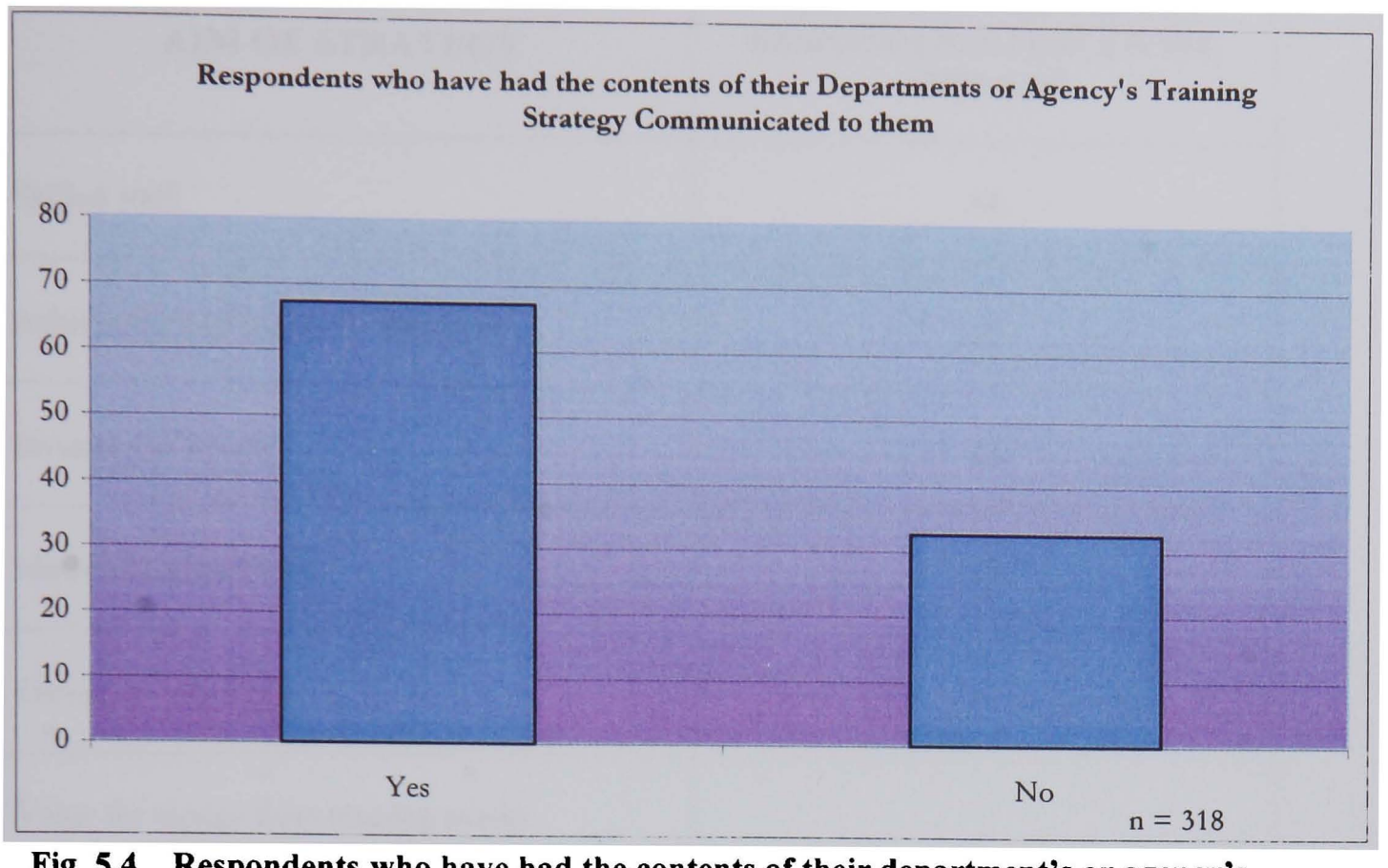


Fig 5.4 Respondents who have had the contents of their department's or agency's training strategy communicated to them

The majority of survey respondents (67.5% in figure 5.3) stated that their organisation did have a training strategy which is what could be expected given the commitment to developing departmental and agency strategies in the *Development and Training for Civil Servants* White Paper (HMSO, 1996, p.3). However, 23.5% of respondents did not know whether their organisation had a training strategy (figure 5.3) and 32.7% of respondents had not had the contents of the strategy communicated to them. This finding mirrors the information obtained from middle managers in the follow-up interviews. Whilst most were able to point to training strategy documents, there was much less awareness about the contents of the strategy. Question 31 on the survey questionnaire asked respondents what their organisation hopes to achieve by its training strategy. An analysis of the qualitative responses to this question is given at table 5.1.

AIM OF DEPARTMENT'S AND AGENCY'S TRAINING STRATEGY

AIM OF STRATEGY	PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS PERCEIVING THIS AIM
Skilled staff	54
Achievement of business objectives	33
Investors in People	14
Motivated Individuals	13
Career development	7
Value for money from training events	7
Don't Know	9

n = 245

Table 5.1 Aim of department's and agency's training strategy

It can be seen from this table that over half the respondents thought that the aim of the strategy was to achieve skilled staff, and a third that it was to achieve the organisation's business objectives. Some (14%) were more cynical in that they thought it was to achieve the Investors in People standard, and a smaller percentage felt that it was about helping individuals with their career development or motivating people.

The views were not mutually exclusive but were held despite messages in departmental and agency training and development plans which referred to strategic aims around meeting operational needs in the context of training and development priorities, and at the same time balancing needs which are related to the wider career development of

individuals. These messages accord with the corporate strategic statements about development and careers in the *Development and Training for Civil Servants* White Paper (HMSO, 1996, p.5-6) which make clear that civil servants can expect:

- "to work in an organisation which encourages learning and offers equality of opportunity
- job specific training and any wider development needed to perform their current job to the best of their ability
- access to information and advice which allows them to prioritise and make informed decisions about their development and their future career
- and support in drawing up, implementing and up-dating a development plan which aims to improve their performance in line with the organisation's needs and their abilities, and in preparing themselves to take full advantage of career opportunities".

This would seem to imply that managers had either not read the messages or if they had read them, they did not believe them. At corporate level the task is to integrate HR planning, and organisational and individual learning strategies in order to link HRD strategy to the wider employee resourcing strategy and the changing organisational strategy (Harrison, 1997, p.40). We shall be returning to the question of career development and motivation in the next chapter when we look in depth at the organisational strategy and training strategy linking mechanisms but we move now to examine how adequately middle managers felt their training needs had been met, and the processes that are in place in their organisations to plan their training and development.

THE TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF MIDDLE MANAGERS

CHANGE DRIVEN TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

Let us first remind ourselves here what Holbeche (1999a) says about aligning training to an organisation's business strategy. She states that balancing the current and future business needs with a training service requires determining the 'what' and 'why' of the strategic purpose of the organisation, and that clues about future needs are often evident in long-term objectives. Holbeche (1999a) adds, "it is important to try and work out how the implementation of business plans and objectives will affect the way people will have to work, as well as what they will need in order to be effective in the changing organisation" (p.17).

The focus groups that were held with the two groups of middle managers in this case study asked participants how their jobs had changed as a result of changes in Civil Service organisational strategy, and what they consider are the key skills and attitudes required to carry out their duties effectively in their own department or agency (see Appendix II for a copy of the focus groups programme). Their perceptions of these job changes have been described fully in Chapter 3. The key skills and attitudes that they felt middle managers require in order to be effective in their changing organisations are delegation, prioritisation, communication, flexibility, financial skills, project management and stress management. They made comments like:

> "I am faced with increased decision making now because of delegation. It is satisfying but I would like the reward for doing it"

"Demonstrating that you are versatile and able to adapt to change is very important"

"Knowing where the parameters are and how to relieve the pressure points and to recognise the pressures that my decisions and attitudes, as well as other people's decisions and attitudes, put on my staff helps to manage stress"

"There is more pressure now to do things on the same basis as if they have bought something in from outside"

"I have had to use a lot more presentation skills in the last few years, presenting bids and put ideas across verbally and in writing"

"You need the ability to take changing policies and project manage the change".

Chapter 3 has looked in depth at Civil Service organisational change, both at a corporate level and, using the information supplied by the survey respondents, at the level of individual departments and agencies. Question 16 on the survey questionnaire (shown at Appendix IV) asked middle managers how their department or agency's business objectives had changed over the past 3 years, and question 17 asked how these changes had impacted on their jobs. Figure 3.4 summarised the changes in business objectives and Table 3.1 their impact on the jobs of middle managers. Unsurprisingly, volume and diversity of work were the major job changes reported by the survey

respondents who observed the biggest changes in their organisation to be restructuring and more of a customer orientation, combined with commercialisation and changing government policies.

Question 18 on the survey questionnaire asked middle managers whether they felt that they had been adequately trained and developed to deal with the job changes they had experienced. Their total responses are shown at Figure 5.5.

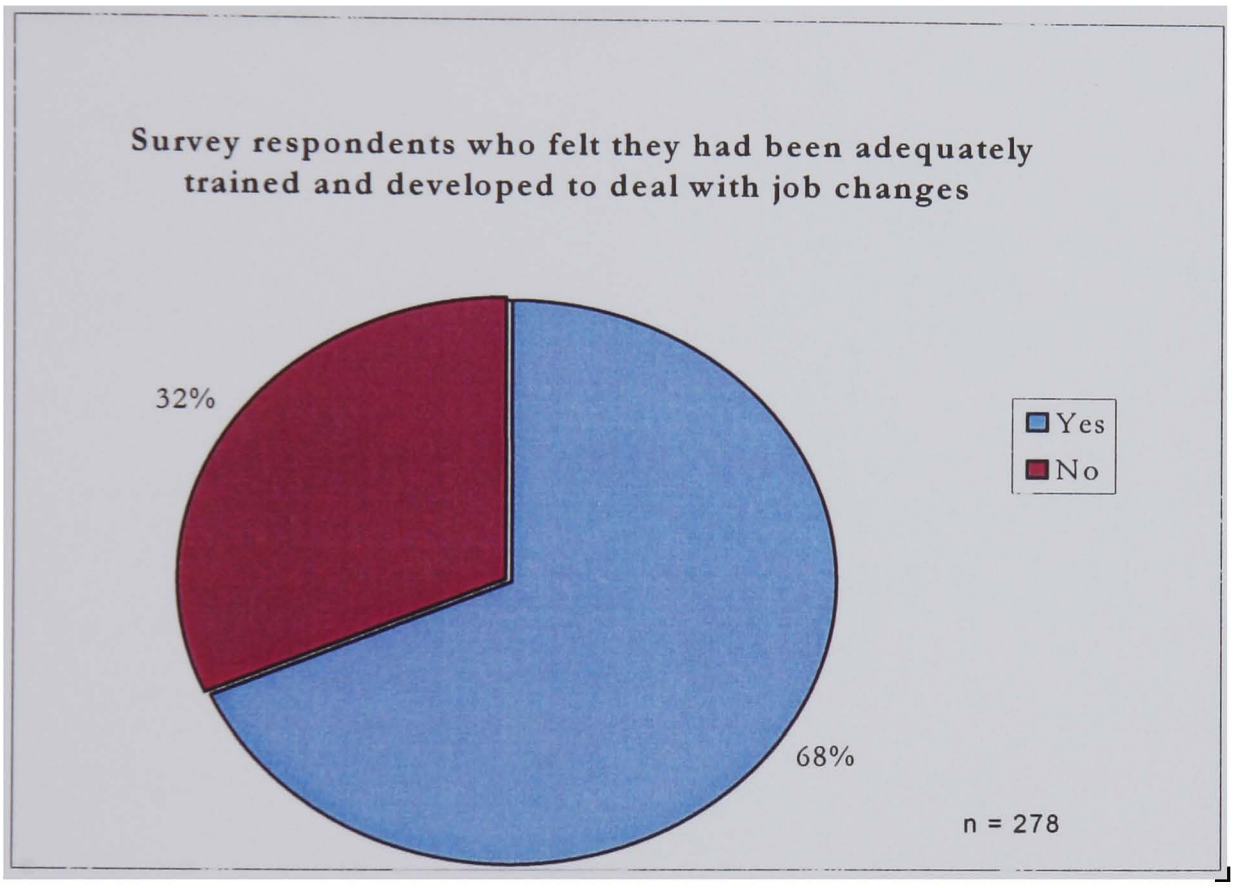


Fig. 5.5 Survey respondents who felt that they had been adequately trained and developed to deal with job changes

The 68% of total survey respondents who did feel that they had been adequately trained and developed to deal with job changes as a result of changing business objectives did not vary significantly as a percentage between middle managers working at Grade 7 and HEO level, which was 67% and 66% respectively, although the percentage for SEOs responding positively to this question was a little higher at 75%. This evidence of an

overall lack of alignment between organisational strategy and training strategy in departments and agencies, as perceived by the middle managers working in them, was further investigated in the survey questionnaire and the follow-up interviews.

Questions 19 and 20 on the questionnaire asked managers to state those areas where they felt they had been adequately trained and developed in the past 3 years, and what training and development needs are still outstanding. A qualitative analysis of the data supplied by respondents is given at Table 5.2 which shows the top 14 training and development needs of middle managers.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT NEED	% RESPONDENTS REPORTING TRAINING NEED SATISFIED	% RESPONDENTS REPORTING TRAINING NEED OUTSTANDING
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY	23	14
COMMUNICATION SKILLS	18	10
STAFF MANAGEMENT	14	11
PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT/ EFFECTIVENESS	13	8
MANAGING CHANGE	11	5
FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT	10	8
PROJECT MANAGEMENT	10	4
POLICY MANAGEMENT	9	4
NEGOTIATING AND INFLUENCING SKILLS	7	3
PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT	7	1
UNDERSTANDING GOVERNMENT & PARLIAMENT	4	2
CONTRACT MANAGEMENT	2	3
QUALITY MANAGEMENT	2	2
STRESS MANAGEMENT	1	0.5

n = 276

Table 5.2 **Top 14 training and development needs resulting from job changes reported by survey respondents**

Looking at this table, information technology stands out as both the largest training need that has been satisfied but also the biggest training need that remains outstanding, closely followed by communication skills and staff management. Interestingly whilst 13% of respondents reported that personal development and effectiveness training needs had been satisfied, and 8% that they had not, the follow-up interviews with

middle managers identified that this is an on-going developmental need, although some were less clear about exactly what 'development' was required as illustrated by the following quotes from one of the managers interviewed:

> "It is difficult to say whether I have any development needs. I suppose over the years I have had a number of opportunities for courses, some of which I have taken up, some of which I have not. I think to some extent I am guided by what other people suggest to me. I am not very imaginative when it comes to what it is I might need and I find it quite helpful to get a really good steer from someone who is independent, somebody in the Personnel and Training Division as well as possibly my line manager"

> "I think that the danger of personal development is that it is a bit introspective. It is inevitably going to be that way and then you can dismiss something. You can dread going on a particular type of course. You can say, "it's not for me, I won't entertain that". So you might need somebody to give you a bit of a nudge".

This then may help to explain why there were not more survey respondents who thought that an outstanding need for them was personal development and effectiveness training. This whole question of developmental training will be explored in more depth later in this chapter and in the next one when we evaluate managing development and careers as an organisational strategy and training strategy linking mechanism in *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996).

The 'top 14' list in total is otherwise very much as could be expected given the information from the respondents about how their jobs had changed (see table 3.1 in Chapter 3). The increased business focus and drive for improved customer service, and more responsibility for staff, financial and performance management, and use of information technology, could reasonably be expected to feed into the list of training needs detailed in table 5.2. What remains disappointing is that on the basis of the quantitative data, over a third of respondents felt that they had been inadequately trained and developed to do their jobs effectively. Some of the comments from the survey respondents are again quite enlightening:

> "I was pleased to attend the Civil Service College public speaking course earlier this year, but I do feel that a lot of training locally has fiddled around the edges. Computer and IT training has been adequate"

> "The traditional way of learning as you go along should have died a death but it hasn't, and there is little time to pick up the treads of a new job, let alone steer it in a new direction"

> "Although vocational training is offered there is no support in other areas of management, for example little account is taken when those who have technical skills are required to manage staff. Whilst courses are available there is little or no support in 'real life' situations"

"Although I have been trained it is difficult to practice it in the current environment where policy is everything and people aren't! I have had training in all aspects of policy work; submissions, briefings, evaluation and also in personal development"

The follow-up interviews that were conducted with some of the survey respondents indicated that most of them were satisfied with the operational training that they had received. A quote from one of them expresses just how satisfied middle managers can be with their training:

"When I first joined the organisation I went on SPSS training, specialist training, IT training, presentation skills. I went on so many things, anything relevant to my job. In my first year I would say that I had about 35 days training. It was good, it put me in a good stance to do what I do".

The 35 days training mentioned in the quote is though more than other people were receiving with some middle managers talking about a minimum of 5 days training a year, and total spend on formal training activity across the Civil Service in 1997/98 amounting to £319 million which was 2.95% of staff costs, an increase of 0.34% from 1995/96 (Cabinet Office, 1998f, p.3). This training spend is above the average of 2.7% of annual salary and 5 days annual training for managers working in UK companies identified in a survey conducted by Cranfield School of Management (Brewster, 1999, p.16) which concluded that there had been a marginal increase in training and development over the previous 10 years.

Whilst the satisfaction with skills training as mentioned by the middle manager interviewed is not unusual, what is less common is satisfaction with developmental training as will be discussed later. The follow-up interviewee concluded her reflections with the comment, "I see this job though as a stepping stone to something else". Here was clearly someone who thought that she was in the driving seat when it came to managing her own career. Other managers felt less confident about this as will be described in the next chapter. The question of how development and training needs are identified in departments and agencies is crucial in this respect and will now be addressed.

IDENTIFYING DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING NEEDS

A straightforward model of identifying and targeting training needs in organisations involves assessing the current situation, envisioning the future, gathering and sorting information, sharing results and deciding on the actions to take to have an impact (Sparhawk, 1995, p.21). Identifying the future skills needs of employees is never easy with organisation skill-based planning and auditing techniques based on the premise that required organisational capabilities can be identified and linked to the skills and behaviour (competencies) that individuals need in order to deliver, and that these competencies can be measured through a skills audit (Hirsh and Reilly, 1998, p.38). Based on research undertaken by the Institute for Employment Studies, Hirsh and Reilly conclude that, "corporate skill planning initiatives will fail if they are too remote from the business units with prime responsibility for recruiting and developing people"(p.41).

Current practice in some organisations is to focus on current organisational requirements and approach the identification of training needs through task analysis which involves establishing appropriate performance standards specifying how tasks should be performed, and the requisite skill and knowledge to perform them, with a trend towards identifying a training need only when there is evidence of a discrepancy between expected and actual performance (Guile and Fonda, 1999, p.17). Guile and Fonda state these approaches both share limitations in that training needs are identified too late and by concentrating on the lack of knowledge and skills, and environmental factors, they also overlook the "critical contribution that people's habitual behaviour make to organisational results" (p.17).

In Chapter 3 we looked at the impact of change on the jobs of middle managers and the implications of changing job descriptions. It was argued that on the basis of Harrison's definition of job training analysis (1997, p.253) this process would identify the learning needs of middle managers working in departments and agencies. In any training strategy there are likely to be three areas of focus: the organisational level where corporate requirements such as culture change programmes are addressed; the departmental level where job-related training and development is likely to take place; and the individual level where people are motivated to close the gap between their current and aspired capabilities (Holbeche, 1999a, p.17). An alternative approach to task analysis as a means of analysing jobs and identifying training needs as described by Guile and Fonda (1999, p.17) is competency analysis which involves identifying what is needed to produce effective performance in a job, role or function (Harrison, 1997, p.260). From the late 1980s organisations have increasing turned to competency frameworks as a way of articulating the generic expectation of workforce attributes that

will lead to high performance (Guile and Fonda, p.17). This approach has been reflected in the development of competence frameworks throughout the Civil Service which are used by virtually every department and agency in some aspect of staff management, whether for recruitment, staff appraisal, assessment or development (HMSO, 1996, p.23). An example of an extract from the middle management competencies used by the Benefits Agency is shown at Table 5.3.

Section 3: Staff Development

Can be illustrated by:

- identifies training and development needs of self and individuals against the business objectives of the Unit
- promotes staff development advising staff where to seek help and advice about developmental issues
- helps individuals to take action on their development needs and to set challenging developmental goals for themselves
- creates opportunities for individuals to acquire recognised qualifications relevant to both their personal development and to business goals
- encourages people to take opportunities to develop themselves to their full potential
- actively seeks and creates challenging opportunities for self development
- coaches and develops others
- continually evaluates the progress of staff and the effectiveness of their development and training
- provides people with regular constructive feedback on their performance
- learns by own and others experience and encourages others to do the same.

Source: Benefits Agency: Competencies

Table 5.3 Extract from Benefits Agency Middle Management Competencies

This framework can be used as a kind of template for assessing the development and training needs of individuals but is disadvantaged by the fact that it is often considered too remote from the people who are expected to use them (Guile and Fonda, 1999, p.17-18). Rather than trying to press employees into the same mould through competency frameworks, successful people managers instead focus and build on individuals' innate talents (Buckingham, 1999, p.44).

Question 21 on the survey questionnaire asked middle managers whether there were any immediate plans to meet their outstanding development and training requirements. The total response to this question is shown at Figure 5.6.

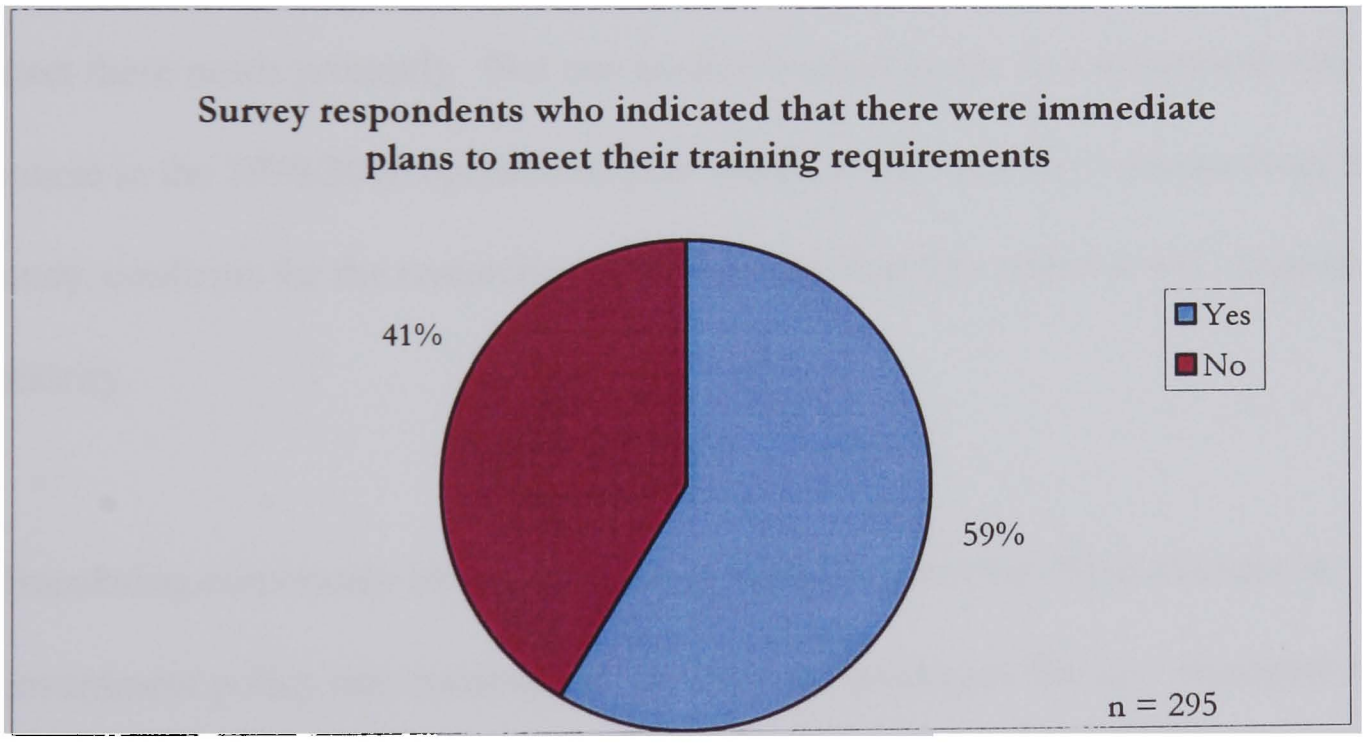


Fig. 5.6 **Survey respondents who indicated that there were immediate plans to meet their training requirements**

It may be seen that 59% of respondents indicated that there were immediate plans and this figure was consistent across the three grades of middle managers questioned. For the remaining 41% it would appear that development and training needs are either not being identified or if they are then they are not being acted upon. This high percentage

does help to explain why over a third of respondents felt they had not been adequately trained and developed to deal with job changes and is a serious issue that merits further investigation by departments and agencies. Training strategy is unlikely to ever align with organisational strategy unless individual training needs are picked up and action taken to satisfy the needs identified.

There are several questions here about the skills of line managers to be able to undertake this exercise. A piece of anecdotal evidence to support the contention that this responsibility is not taken seriously enough is that the researcher designed a new Civil Service College course entitled 'Just-In-Time Training Techniques for Managers' based on the preliminary research findings and targeted at line managers working in departments and agencies to help them identify the training needs of their staff, and to meet these needs promptly. Not one student booked on the two advertised runs of this course in the 1999/2000 operational year which, along with the evidence from the case study, confirms for the researcher the conclusion that this matter is not regarded as a priority.

Translating corporately identified training needs which result from changes in government policy into training and development packages that line managers working in decentralised departments and agencies will see as leading to organisational benefits remains a key challenge for the Civil Service. The problem is made more difficult by the fact that many civil servants are self nominated for training, as we shall see when we move now to look at how training is planned in departments and agencies. Encouraging people to request development and training for themselves assumes that

they know what they need – they may not. Identifying skill deficits is a skill in itself even with competency frameworks to help with this process.

Planning Development and Training in Departments and Agencies

Figure 5.7 contains details of how the development and training of survey respondents is planned in departments and agencies (see question 24 on the survey questionnaire at Appendix IV).

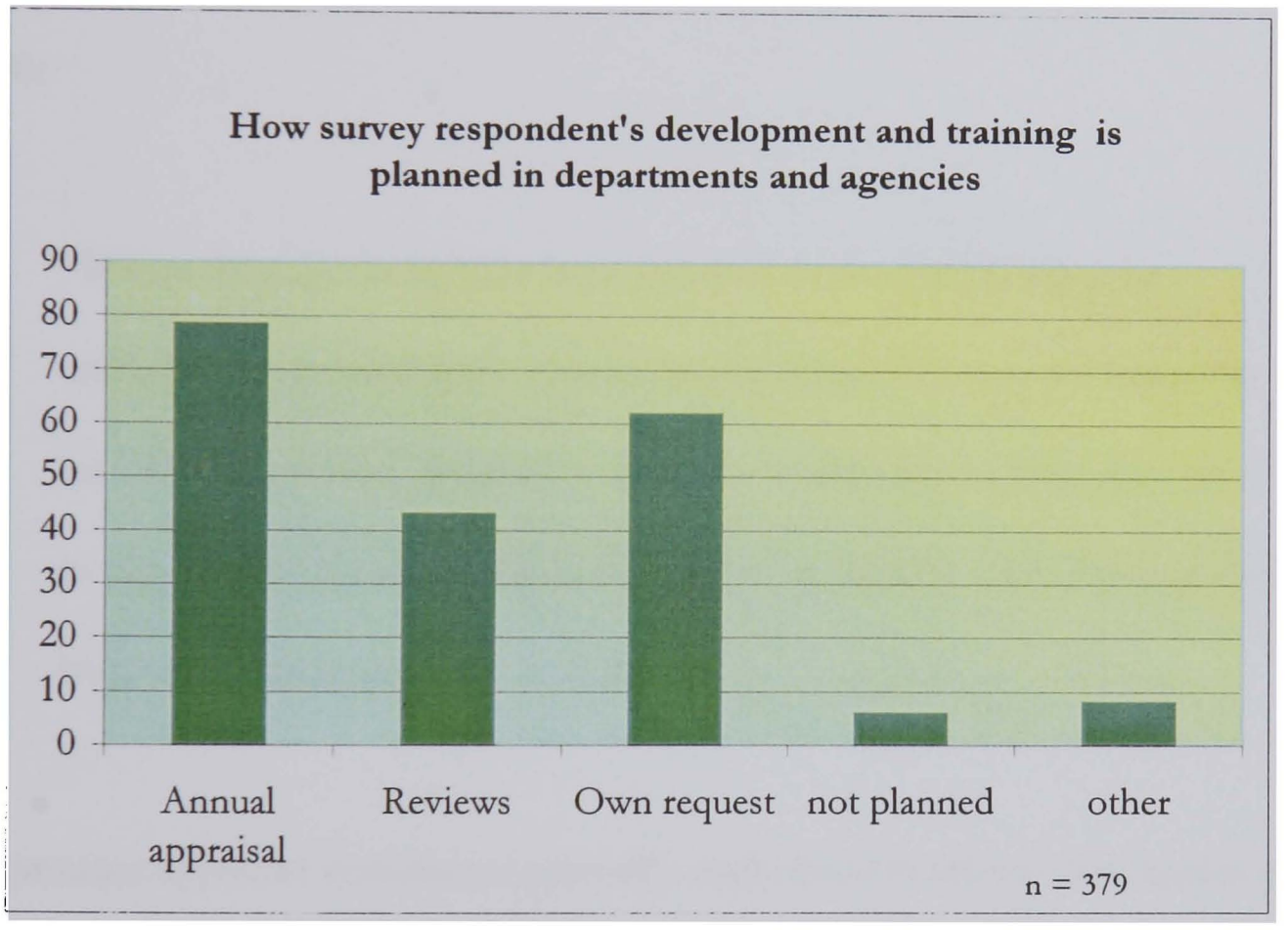


Fig 5.7 How survey respondent's development and training is planned in departments and agencies

By far the largest percentage of middle managers (78%) had their development and training planned as part of the annual appraisal process, closely followed by 62% who requested training for themselves. An Investors in People (IiP) organisation is expected to have a systems for promoting participation between managers and employees so that they can identify job-related training needs together (Mason, 1995, p.35). Given the

commitment to (IiP) in *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996, p.3) it is disappointing that there were not more middle managers having their training planned by reviews (43%).

Another assessment indicator for the IiP standard is that, "a process exists for regularly reviewing the training and development needs of all employees" (Mason, 1995, p.28). Mason is critical of appraisal systems that assess training needs because he considers that they are often unsuccessful but he accepts that an effective process for reviewing training and development needs is not easy to operate. He states of appraisal systems (p.29):

> "Where they appear to have been imposed from on high, they are unlikely to command trust, respect and openness between the appraiser and those appraised. Ironically, since the system has an important part to play in how the organisation carries out its training, little training may be given to those involved in appraisal".

Performance appraisal systems are generally understood to refer to the regular meetings between employees and managers to assess performance, identify action to improve performance, and identify development needs, and the ability of the system to deliver useful information on training needs will depend on the quality of that process (Bee, 1994, p.52-53). Despite their drawbacks they are still the main way of identifying individual needs in organisations although they will rarely be the best source for the identification of organisational needs (Bee, 1994, p.53-54).

A development that has taken place in Civil Service departments and agencies is the use of Personal Development Plans (PDPs) to plan training and development. The *Development and Training for Civil Servants* White Paper (HMSO,1996, p.6) laid down a commitment that civil servants could expect support with preparing and implementing a development plan. Although survey respondents were not asked specifically whether they used PDPs for planning purposes, the qualitative responses to questions 21 and 24 which asked about training plans have been analysed and a count made of those middle managers volunteering that PDPs were used to plan development and training. Table 5.4 gives details of the percentage of respondents, by grade, who indicated that PDPs were used.

SURVEY RESPONDENTS USING PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS (PDPs) TO PLAN THEIR TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

GRADE OF RESPONDENT	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS BY GRADE WHO INDICATED PDPs USED TO PLAN TRAINING
GRADE 7	12
SEO	10
HEO	6
TOTAL	8

n = 359

Table 5.4 **Survey respondents using personal development plans to plan their training and development**

Whilst the percentages shown in the table are not large, it is suspected that had the question been asked about the use of PDPs the responses would have been larger.

"Effective PDPs draw on a wide variety of sources of information and have a holistic view of development" (Clutterbuck, 1998, p.122). Clutterbuck therefore sees the PDP as a personal development planning net drawing in personal objectives around life and career goals, as well as business and performance objectives, and feedback and support, into a self-development plan (p.122). To benefit the individual and the organisation PDPs, he states:

- need to balance short-term and long-term goals, and job and personal objectives
- set clear and measurable milestones for achievement and draw on feedback to assess progress
- define actual and potential sources of support
- allow for planned and serendipitous learning
- and be aligned with broader organisational goals.

In reality he feels that, "few PDP processes deliver on even half of these criteria" because there is an unwillingness to "unleash widespread demand from people in the organisation for developmental support" (p.123). The interviews conducted with some of the survey respondents would certainly support Clutterbuck's viewpoint. The following two quotes are typical in this respect:

> "We have got this personal development plan, it's all set out. People who come into a new job obviously have a learning curve, and there will be certain training that they have to take on board to develop competencies. But there is a limit to that. After the third or fourth year in the job they are often scrabbling around for ideas to put on the PDP"

"I think it is difficult to know what to put in the PDP because you don't necessarily know what's available although we have tried to address that to a certain extent by one member of staff keeping up lists of courses that you might be interested in. But I think it is difficult because you have done the management courses and the specialist skills that are particular to your job, you have probably got those down to a 't'. Most of the sorts of things that I seem to get involved in are new packages on the computer system that need addressing or particular nuances of the job, going on a conference where you are talking to academics about particular issues that are related to the subject matter that you are dealing with. I think it is just a case of keeping your eyes and ears open about what's going on, I don't think it's easy"

The lack of support from a line manager, HR section or a mentor to help middle managers with their training and development needs comes over very strongly from these quotes, with the PDPs failing to provide the holistic view of development advocated by Clutterbuck (1998, p.122). Little wonder then that 62% of survey respondents indicated that their development and training was planned at their own request. This was a view that came over very strongly from the middle managers who were interviewed and some other quotes are enlightening:

> "I see myself as being primarily responsible for identifying my own training needs. There are structures in place for you to formally identify what your training needs are, that comes around at the annual appraisal

time, but the annual appraisals are by their nature spread out. There are opportunities throughout the year to identify courses of training that would be useful to you, and then the onus is very much on you to apply for them. Internal courses get advertised in the weekly newsletter, people have to decide whether they want to go for it or not. People need to be proactive themselves"

"I have found since I got through the assessment centre that I get a lot of people who are due to do the board two years later saying, "what courses did you do, what courses should I do?". So a lot of it is going by word of mouth with people saying, "I found this course very useful or this one was complete rubbish". But line managers in many cases don't know the courses or they are very busy or they assume you are going to do it yourself".

Clearly the responsibility of the line manager in helping to identify development and training needs is a vital component of the support system and we will look at this role in more detail in the next sub-section. From what the middle managers said at their interviews they are clearly looking for some kind of support with this process although the following quote does not exemplify the ideal way in which this help would be given:

> "My line manager on my old section saw me and another colleague and sat us down and gave us a list of courses and course application forms and said, "sign at the bottom". I thought that made a lot of sense

because I didn't know what courses I needed to do and some sort of direction was very, very useful".

Within departments and agencies there are some HR support mechanisms for planning development and training but the middle managers interviewed indicated that these HR staff are doing little more than administrative functions:

"We have Staff Development Co-ordinators (SDCs) and they act as co-ordinators to collate all the training and development needs and to manage the training budget, and to act as an intermediary between the Staff Development Unit (SDU) and the training providers. For example, if I go on a course, I agree it is a training need which will support my objectives, and I fill in a form which goes to the SDC who liases with the SDU, makes sure the funds are available and makes the arrangements with the training provider. It is an orderly process. Our SDU run many internal courses and also buy in training"

"The Training Liaison Officer collates the training comment sheets. I suspect that is about it. They don't book the courses, and I don't think they direct training. I suspect all they have time to do is to collect the evaluation forms".

Clearly without HR support the role of line managers becomes even more crucial and we move now to look at this important issue.

THE ROLE OF LINE MANAGERS

Line managers, as we have seen, are crucial to the effective assessment of training needs in their parts of the organisation, whether this process is carried out through the appraisal system or specific initiatives, and it is about this that Holbeche reminds us in the second part of her article on *Bonding training to strategy* (1999b). The term 'line manager' can be applied to anyone with operational functions who does not have a central role in HR and many organisations believe it is no longer feasible for the HR function to take central responsibility for developing people (Dawson, 1999). In an interview with Gary Miles, a Programme Director at Roffey Park Management Institute, Dawson identified that Roffey had seen an increase in the number of line managers looking to develop coaching, counselling and team-building skills (1999, p.13). Similarly, with regard to team-building, the Civil Service College reported in its *Annual Report and Accounts* (Civil Service College, 1999, p.12) that the Team Challenge events run at Sunningdale and in department and agency's own premises, had been very popular; the question remains about the level of unsatisfied training needs for coaching and counselling across the Civil Service. Involving line managers in actually providing training can be beneficial as long as these managers are trained to deliver their messages effectively (Holbeche, 1999b, p.18).

The Civil Service has long recognised the important role of line managers in developing people. A report by the Cabinet Office entitled *Developing People for Results Through the Line* (1991b) was based on "a review of the ways in which line managers can be made more clearly responsible for developing the people who work for them and encouraged and helped to do so" (para. 1.1). The purpose of the report was to give departments and agencies some best practice guidelines and accepted that "on its own

the report will achieve nothing" and was dependent upon the ideas being adopted in their organisations (para. 1.2). It identified some interesting common obstacles to the effective implementation of policy statements about the role of line managers that already exist in departments and agencies: that existing systems and structures do not fit with the policy; insufficient authority, skills and support given to line mangers; poor marketing; lack of genuine commitment from the top; lack of accountability; and weak or non-existent monitoring of performance (para. 1.9).

One of the standards for Investors in People is that "an Investor in People makes a public commitment from the top to develop all employees to achieve the organisation's business objectives" and IiP assessors will want to see evidence of how the commitment has been communicated from the top of the organisation (Mason, p.21-22). The IiP standards will be examined in depth in the next chapter but clearly some of the obstacles to the effective implementation of policy statements about the role of line managers in developing human resources as identified by the Cabinet Office report (1991b) should on the face of it have been overcome by the achievement of the IiP standard in departments and agencies. To support line managers in their people management role a booklet was produced entitled *Developing People – the Line Manager's Job* (Cabinet Office, 1991c).

The role of line managers in departments and agencies, however, is not restricted to developing people. There has also been a more general shift to delegating personnel work to the line and the Cabinet Office set up a project with 10 departments and agencies to help them make progress in delegating personnel management responsibilities to managers, and to analyse the lessons learned (Merchant and Wilson,

1994). Merchant and Wilson accepted that "the pace and direction of change is altering traditional expectations about the way staff are managed and what they are expected to contribute" and that "middle managers bear the brunt of these changes: they are expected to help their staff acquire new skills and deliver increased efficiency, while improving service standards" (1994, p.38). They stated that the projects highlighted the need for top management to "demonstrate by example what knowledge, skills and attributes are required if the organisation is to achieve its business goals and reward managers who manage staff effectively, and avoid conflicting messages about what the organisation needs and what it rewards"(p.39).

One of the three elements in *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996) is the aim to give individual civil servants more confidence and ability to be responsible for their own development and careers and the White Paper sees this happening "within an invigorated partnership involving the individuals, their line managers and top management" (p.5). We will be returning to this partnership is more detail in the next chapter when we look at this element of the Civil Service training strategy as a linking mechanism but the White Paper (HMSO, 1996) accepted that the line manager's role within the partnership is "demanding and pivotal to its success", and all the more so given the devolved personnel functions and flatter and leaner organisational structures that line managers are operating in which means that they need top management support and the training and development to take on their staff management responsibility (p.41).

As we saw in Chapter 3, at table 3.1, a total of 8% of managers volunteered increased staff management as impacting on their job tasks as a result of changing business

objectives in their departments and agencies. Given the shift in responsibilities for staff management issues it is perhaps surprising that this percentage is not higher, and the 1% of HEO managers who thought that there had been a decrease in this aspect of their work is interesting. The link with the volume of work has already been made in chapter 3 but the point will be reiterated here. 15% of middle managers volunteered the fact that their workload had increased and this increase happened at the very time they were being asked to take on more people responsibilities. Some of the line managers who were interviewed inferred that their priorities were by necessity operational rather than staff management ones. As one middle manager so succinctly put it, "it is a business first, staff management second, philosophy around here".

This has led the researcher to conclude that the focus on measurable operational targets in departments and agencies means that priority will be given to this aspect of management even if this means that some of the responsibilities for developing people are at times neglected. It appears that this remains true despite the organisational commitment to the Investors in People standard and is a point that we will pick up on again in the next chapter. The link with this conclusion and Merchant and Wilson's (1994) point about the possible dichotomy between spending time on staff development and improving service standards when volumes of managerial work is increasing, and the conflicting messages that can be sent to line managers about organisational priorities, is an important one. Further academic research into the effect of challenging operational targets on middle management behaviour in Civil Service departments and agencies would be a useful addition to the literature on this subject.

We will return to this issue again because the conclusion is a key one in testing the hypothesis in this case study which is that when linking organisational strategy and training strategy the linking mechanisms selected in the training strategy need to be compatible with the organisational strategy and complementary and compatible with one another. Requiring line managers to spend more time on their people responsibilities as part of the organisation's training strategy is always going to be more difficult in circumstances where there are increasing workloads. Linking mechanisms, therefore, need to take account of the organisational strategy and reflect the reality of how the training strategy will be delivered on the ground. The linking mechanisms selected by the Civil Service will be explored in depth in the next chapter. In this chapter we will move now to look at how training strategy is operating in departments and agencies in the training provision that is made available to middle managers.

TRAINING PROVISION IN DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES

METHODS OF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

"The world of learning is changing and learning is changing the world" (Masie, 1999, p.32). Masie sees new technology at the heart of this revolution; what he describes as "e-learning". Training methods need to keep up with the rate of change and offer a variety of opportunities to meet individual's own learning styles (Holbeche, 1999c, p.19). Despite Holbeche's (1999c, p.19) assertion that the idea that training is an off-the-job experience is becoming outdated, courses continue to be the most popular method of training and development used by the middle managers who responded to the survey questionnaire. An analysis of the qualitative responses to question 21 (see Appendix IV) which asked managers to

specify the plans that had been made to meet their training requirements is shown in table 5.5.

TYPE OF TRAINING PLANNED FOR SURVEY RESPONDENTS

TRAINING PLANNED	% OF RESPONDENTS INDICATING THIS TYPE OF TRAINING
TRAINING COURSES	55
QUALIFICATIONS	8
ON-THE-JOB TRAINING	6
WORKSHOPS, SEMINARS AND CONFERENCES	6
WORK SHADOWING	2
JOB MOVES	2
MENTORING	2
VISITS AND TALKS	2
OPEN LEARNING	2
READING	1
COMPUTER BASED TRAINING	1
SECONDMENTS	1

n = 173

Table 5.5 Type of training planned for survey respondents

It can be seen from this table that by far the most commonly used method of training and development in departments and agencies remains training courses with only 1% or

2% of respondents indicating the use of more innovative approaches to learning such as secondments, computer based training, open learning or mentoring. The learning revolution mentioned by Masie seems therefore to be some way ahead for civil servants. This finding is supported by the quantitative data obtained from the answers to question 22 on the survey questionnaire which asked about training and development provision. Table 5.6 analyses these results and they are presented graphically at figure 5.8 which shows methods of training and development as a percentage of total responses.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT METHOD	% OF RESPONDENTS USING THIS METHOD
EXTERNAL TRAINING COURSE(S)	85%
INTERNAL TRAINING COURSE(S)	71%
ON-THE-JOB TRAINING	56%
OPEN LEARNING	11%
DEVELOPMENT CENTRE	2%
SECONDMENT(S)	6%
JOB SHADOWING	4%
USE OF A MENTOR	6%
RESOURCE CENTRE	1%
PROJECT WORK	12%
ACTION LEARNING GROUP	2%
OTHER	10%

n = 376

Table 5.6 Methods of training and development used by survey respondents

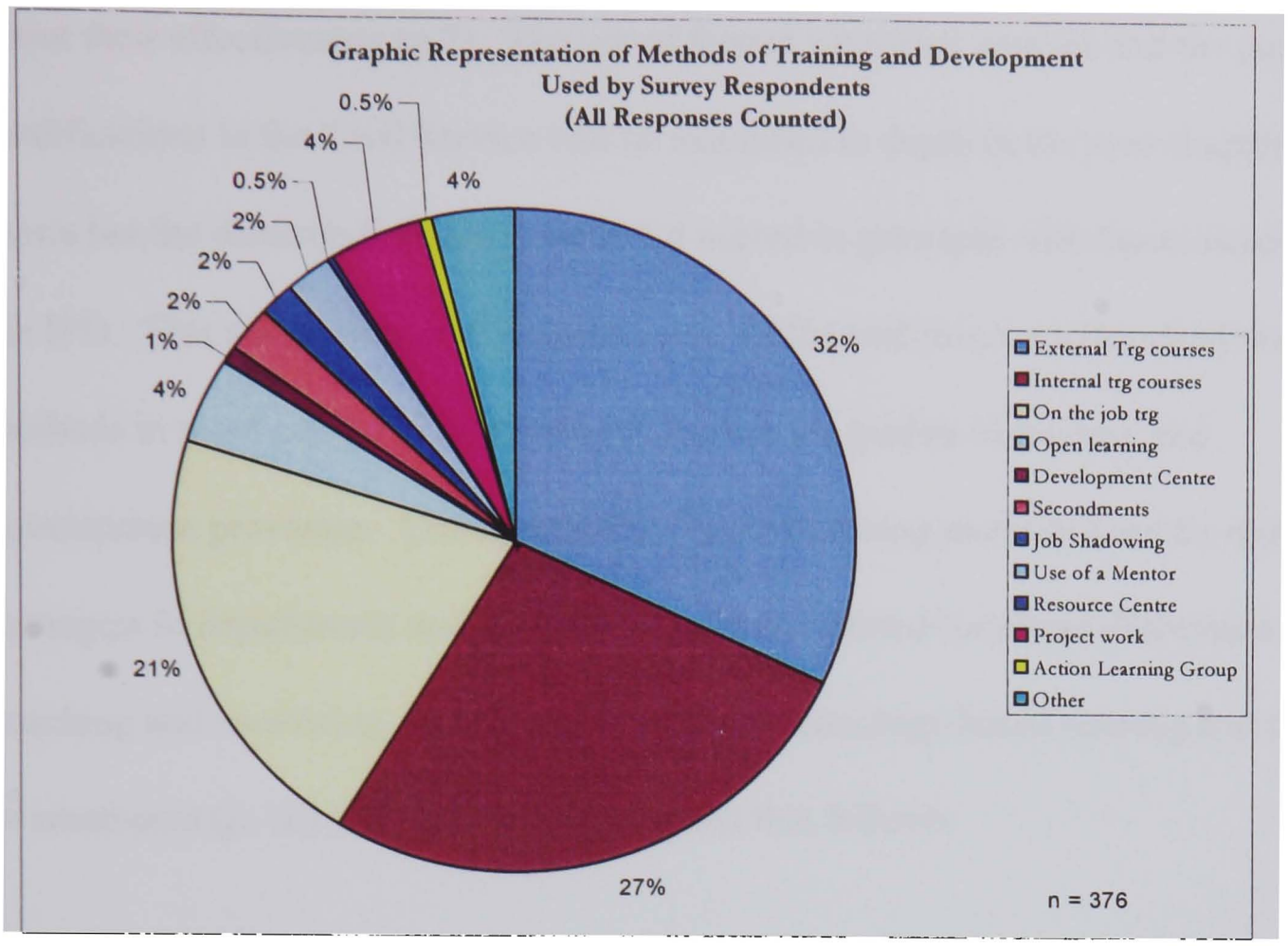


Fig 5.8 Graphic representation of methods of training and development used by survey respondents (all responses counted)

Whilst this quantitative data mirrors the qualitative responses with regard to training courses, there is a larger percentage of respondents indicating that training and development has been received by way of on-the-job training. This would seem to suggest that managers are less likely to plan to undertake on-the-job training but they have a better appreciation of this type of training method once they have undergone the training and development process.

The most widely used training methods are therefore the traditional ones (Institute of Personnel and Development, 1999, p.6). The Institute of Personnel and Development (IPD) survey report *Training and Development in Britain 1999* whilst reporting that traditional methods such as on-the-job training, courses and formal education were the most frequently used and the most effective, also predicted the largest growth rate in

methods which utilise new technology, although training managers are still uncertain about their effectiveness (p.2). The use of formal education courses and the pursuit of qualifications in the Civil Service will be examined in depth in the next chapter of this thesis but the research findings in table 5.6 accord in principle with those identified by the IPD. This sub-section will examine some of the traditional and less traditional methods in more depth before moving to look at the quality of training and development provision. Three particular types of training methods used by middle managers in departments and agencies have been selected for closer discussion: coaching and mentoring, self-development and technology-based training and these will be numbered (i), (ii) and (iii) in the discussion that follows:

(i) Coaching and mentoring

Whilst 56% of respondents indicated that they had received on-the-job training, only 6% responded that they had a mentor (see table 5.6). Whilst the distinction between coaching and mentoring is not always made clear, it can be simply stated, and coaching is "a structured, two-way process in which individuals develop skills and achieve defined competencies through assessment, guided practical experience, and regular feedback" and "it is the responsibility of a line manager who has an immediate and day-to-day accountability for the learner's performance" whereas a mentor will rarely be a learner's line manager and is someone who "acts as a friend and trusted counsellor" (Parsloe, 1995, p.1 and p.24). The dual role of a mentor in providing both professional advice and emotional support can be a source of tension for a mentor (Brockbank and Beech, 1999, p.53).

Coaching is associated with on-the-job or through-the-job learning but if jobs are not chosen carefully it may fail to deliver the expected learning benefits from working on relevant job tasks (Hardingham, 1999, p.33). A project assignment programme is similar to the coaching approach, the difference being that whereas coaching involves the trainee performing more routine tasks, in project assignments particular tasks are identified as projects which are intended to stretch the capabilities of the trainee (Rae, 1995, p.70). 12 % of survey respondents indicated that they had used project work as a method of training and development in their own organisations.

Although all departments and agencies use some sort of coaching, the adoption of formal mentoring schemes is less widespread. Only one of the middle managers interviewed had any experience of being mentored and he found it useful as a training and development method. He said,

> "Mentoring was suggested by my line manager because she had had a member of staff who had gone through this and it was very successful before. We have talked about what motivates me, how my outside life has affected my work. What it has taught me is some models to apply to things. I am not a terribly theoretical person but it is useful sometimes to think that someone else has had similar experiences and one of the main things I have learnt through that is the power I have for myself to make decisions, as opposed to thinking that the organisation has decided this for me. It has been terrifically helpful to be able to take three hours out of the office every two months. I feel very privileged to have the training

funds for this. It has been a very flexible development opportunity completely tailored to meeting my needs".

This interviewee had the benefit of an mentor who was external to the organisation, one other middle manager also indicated that her agency was thinking about introducing an internal mentoring scheme:

"Our division is considering mentoring; I think that we have been asked to say what we think about the idea. For me the attraction is the development of some of the competency areas but also having someone to talk to outside of your own line management chain about problems or issues"

A number of the interviewees indicated that it was helpful having the opportunity to discuss their training and development with the researcher, and those that had attended development courses felt that they had been useful in helping them to become more proactive in focusing on their own self-development. The skills of managers in departments and agencies to be able to effectively undertake the coaching and mentoring roles, however, remains questionable, as does the time to be able to do these jobs properly given increasing workloads and more devolved, target driven management responsibilities. The increasing use of assessment and development centres is one way in which departments and agencies can help to overcome this problem and another quote from one of the line managers interviewed is interesting in this respect:

"We are also looking at the possibility of assessment centres, not necessarily for bright high flyers on management development schemes nor the plodders but for those people who once recognised can be developed, and no-one has recognised them. Randomly selecting names and sending people through the assessment centre to give them the opportunity to look at themselves and their own needs to give them more honest feedback and to start to inbed in the system feedback as a way of giving people development. It would be helping people identify their development needs in a way that their line managers are not yet skilled at doing. The problem is that it is expensive but it is a way of showing staff that we value them, that we are trying to improve our management".

Although the words "assessment centre" have been used by this line manager, to many writers there is no difference between assessment centres and development centres (Harrison, 1997, p.347). Whilst both types of centres involve groups of participants taking part in a variety of job simulations, tests and exercises with observers assessing their performance against pre-determined, job related dimensions, Harrison advises that it is the use of the collected data that makes the difference with development centres used to identify development needs and assessment centres used for promotion (1997, p.347).

(ii) Self-development

Assessment of learning needs can of course also be undertaken by individuals themselves to determine their strengths and weaknesses and to formulate their own

development plan (Harrison, 1997, p.350). Self-development is an all-embracing term which can include self-instruction, self-learning, and distance learning (Rae, 1995, p.46). Although technology-based training will be discussed separately in the next sub-section, some of the training and development methods indicated by survey respondents would come into the category of self-development. Reading was a training method volunteered by a small number (1%) of respondents when indicating the type of training that was planned for them and this is the simplest form of self-instruction (Rae, 1995, p.47). Programmed textbooks, audio cassettes, audio-visual packages, video cassette recordings and correspondence courses are alternative approaches which can be included in the term "distance learning" (Rae, 1995, p.50-55). 11% of survey respondents stated that their training had been received by way of open learning which enabled them to learn at a time, pace and place (possibly at a distance) to suit them but only 1% had used a resource centre. As an example of good organisational practice in a department, one middle manager interviewed said,

> "The other thing that we have is something called Open House which is a suite on the ground floor of this building where people can go in and sit quietly and use computer based training material or they can loan CDs, video tapes and books for taking home or working at their desks. I did do a programme there as well this year on project management techniques".

Overall though there is a disappointing lack of use of these training methods despite the stated intention in *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996, p.37) that civil servants in departments and agencies would accept responsibility for their

own self development as part of the training strategy for the Civil Service. As further evidence of the absence of the new approaches to learning, only 2% of respondents had been a member of an action learning group or set which involves regular meetings between individuals, either drawn from several organisations or from various parts of the same one, to discuss and help solve real organisational problems, encouraged and supported by a facilitator (Rae, 1992, p.161-162).

This reliance on more traditional training and development methods, and the apparent absence of self-development opportunities, is an extremely important point and one that we will return to again when we look in detail at the linking mechanisms selected by the Civil Service in its attempt to link training strategy to organisational strategy in its decentralised departments and agencies. On the face of it though, the evidence about training and development provision in departments and agencies to support this move to self-development is far from encouraging. The relationship with career management is clearly a key issue in this respect. Even if middle managers had received the messages that they should take responsibility for their self-development they were still very unclear about the direction that this development should take.

Some of the managers interviewed had considered secondments as a way of developing themselves and one person was on a secondment at the time of the interview. He was though uncertain about the managerial motivation in giving him a secondment opportunity and said,

> "If I went back and asked management why they chose me for the secondment I don't know whether they had it calculated or not. I think

that they did to an extent but I feel that it was more a case of them thinking that I would be good at building relationships. I don't think that they were as bothered about the skills I would develop"

With regard to his future career, this person added rather despondently:

"With the competency based recruitment and promotion system I don't know whether those skills from my secondment will give me any advantage over other candidates"

As we saw from table 5.6, only 6% of survey respondents had used secondments as a training and development method and only 1% indicated that were plans to meet their training needs in this way. Given the stated intention that there should be greater mobility for managers both within and outside the Civil Service which we have seen goes back over 30 years to the Fulton Report (HMSO, 1968, p.105), and which has been reiterated since then and is now a key component of the *Modernising Government* White Paper (The Stationery Office, 1999, p.61), this research finding is enlightening. The data was of course collected before the *Modernising Government* White Paper was published. Given the messages that the White Paper (The Stationery Office, 1999) contains about setting targets for mobility, and monitoring progress at all grades (p.61), it will be interesting to see just how this commitment changes the training and development methods used in departments and agencies in the future, and also, given the comment from the middle manager interviewed about career advancement, just how those secondments are managed.

(iii) Technology-based training

Only 1% of survey respondents indicated that there were plans to meet their training and development needs by the use of computer-based training (CBT) as stated in table 5.5. CBT or technology-based training as it is now often described can be a lonely and forgettable experience (Hills and Francis, 1999). During the 1980s, however, there was a big increase in computer applications to training (Rae, 1995, p.56) and in line with this trend it has been used in departments and agencies for training on new procedures and systems such as unemployment benefit training in the Employment Service. Hills and Francis (1999) identified that adding a social context to the training can make a difference to the effectiveness of training delivered by this cost-effective method (p.48). An increasing number of organisations are recognising that Information and Communications Technology (ICT) could fundamentally change their organisation's approach to training and development, with performance support systems providing individualised on-line information access available to each employee, although they have so far failed to transform the performance of those who have used them (Guile and Fonda, 1999, p.19). Reliance on traditional teaching methods delivered electronically will reduce the effectiveness of online training (Schank, 1999, p.54).

Although technology based training has yet to make a real impact on training and development methods in the Civil Service it will be interesting to observe future developments in training strategy. Given the Government's enthusiasm for information technology, and its target for the electronic delivery of all public services by the year 2008 as stated in the *Modernising Government* White Paper (The Stationery Office, 1999, p.45-53), a move towards the use of more technology based training could be expected. However, further speculation about this development is difficult at this stage

and we therefore move instead to looking at the quality of training that is currently provided in departments and agencies.

THE QUALITY OF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

A concern for the quality of training and development provided is one of the main reasons for training evaluation (Bee, 1994, p.174). Bee argue that there are many ways to evaluate training and each way "provides some information or some window into the process". This sub-section is merely attempting to do that; it is a small "window" into the quality of the training and development received by the middle managers working in the departments and agencies.

Question 23 on the survey questionnaire asked respondents to rate the quality of the training and development in terms of its relevance, timing, content and delivery to give some indication of the overall quality on a five point scale ranging from 'very good' to 'very poor' (see Appendix IV). The question was not designed to get into levels of evaluation, as a full evaluation of Civil Service training and development would merit a research project in its own right. It was instead seeking to provide a "window" into the quality issue to help answer the question, "how will we know we've arrived" in the "how" of training strategies (Holbeche, 1999c). A quantitative analysis of the respondent's answers to the quality questions are shown at figures 5.9, 5.10, 5.11 and 5.12.

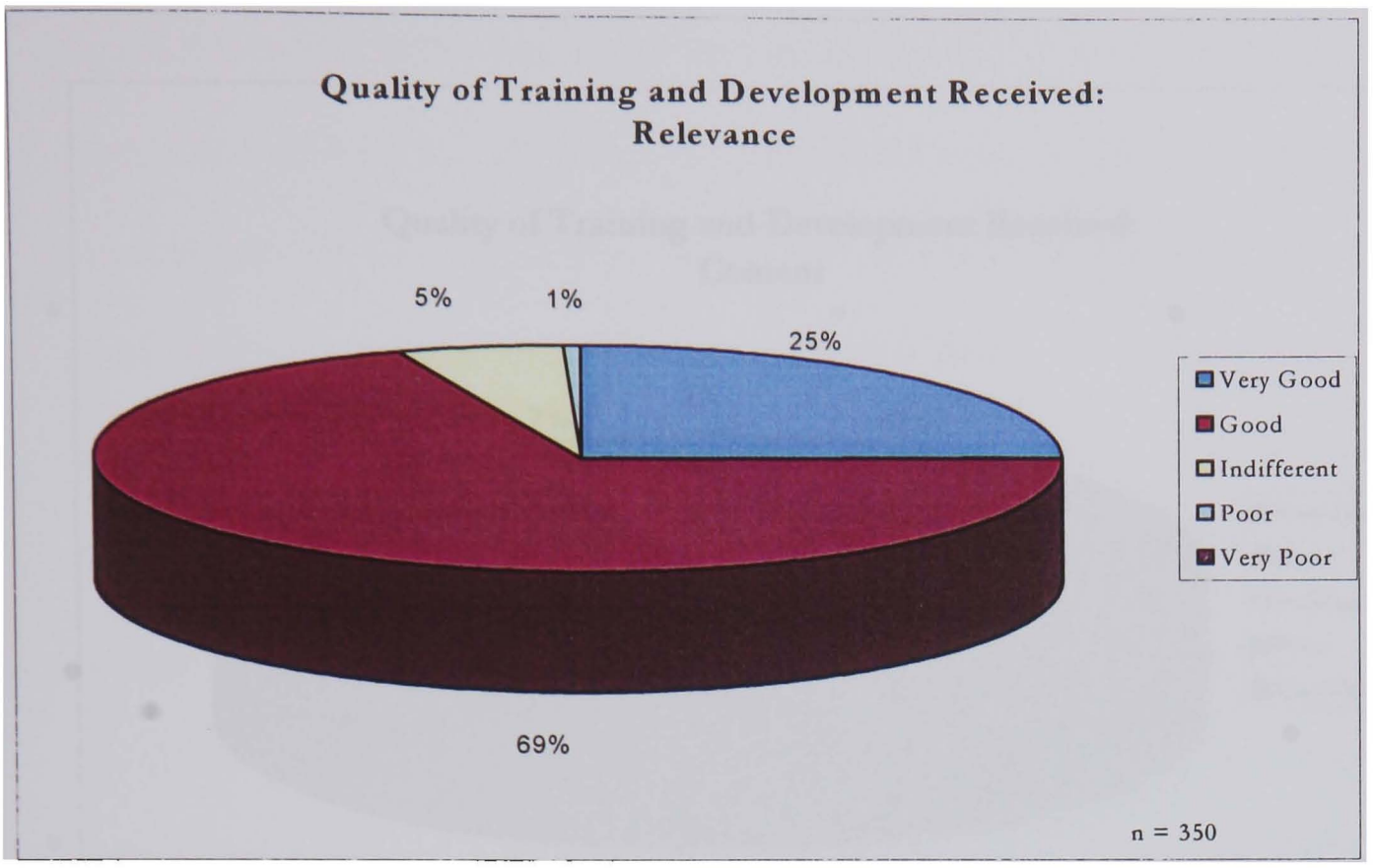


Fig 5.9 Quality of training and development received: relevance

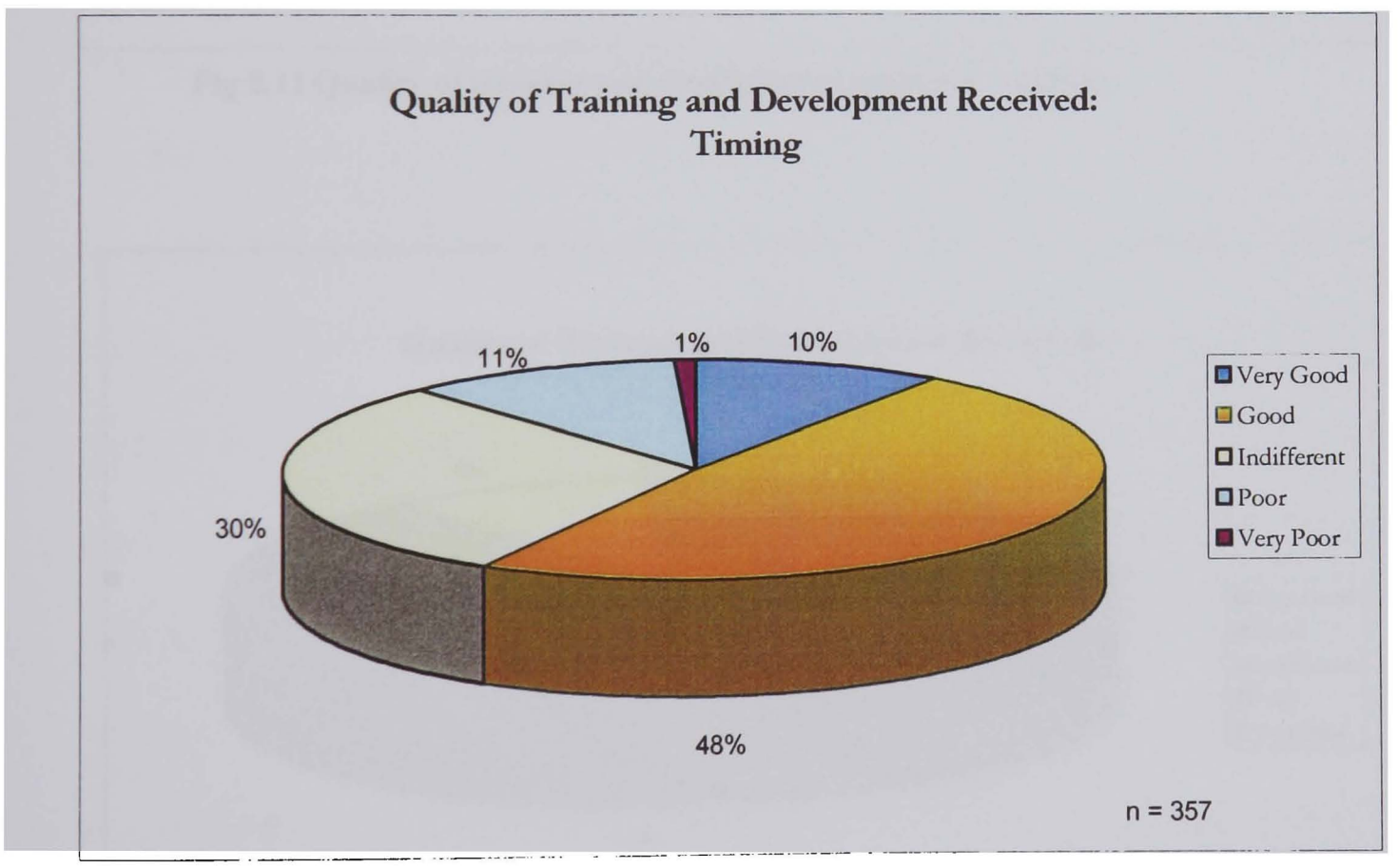


Fig 5.10 Quality of training and development received: timing

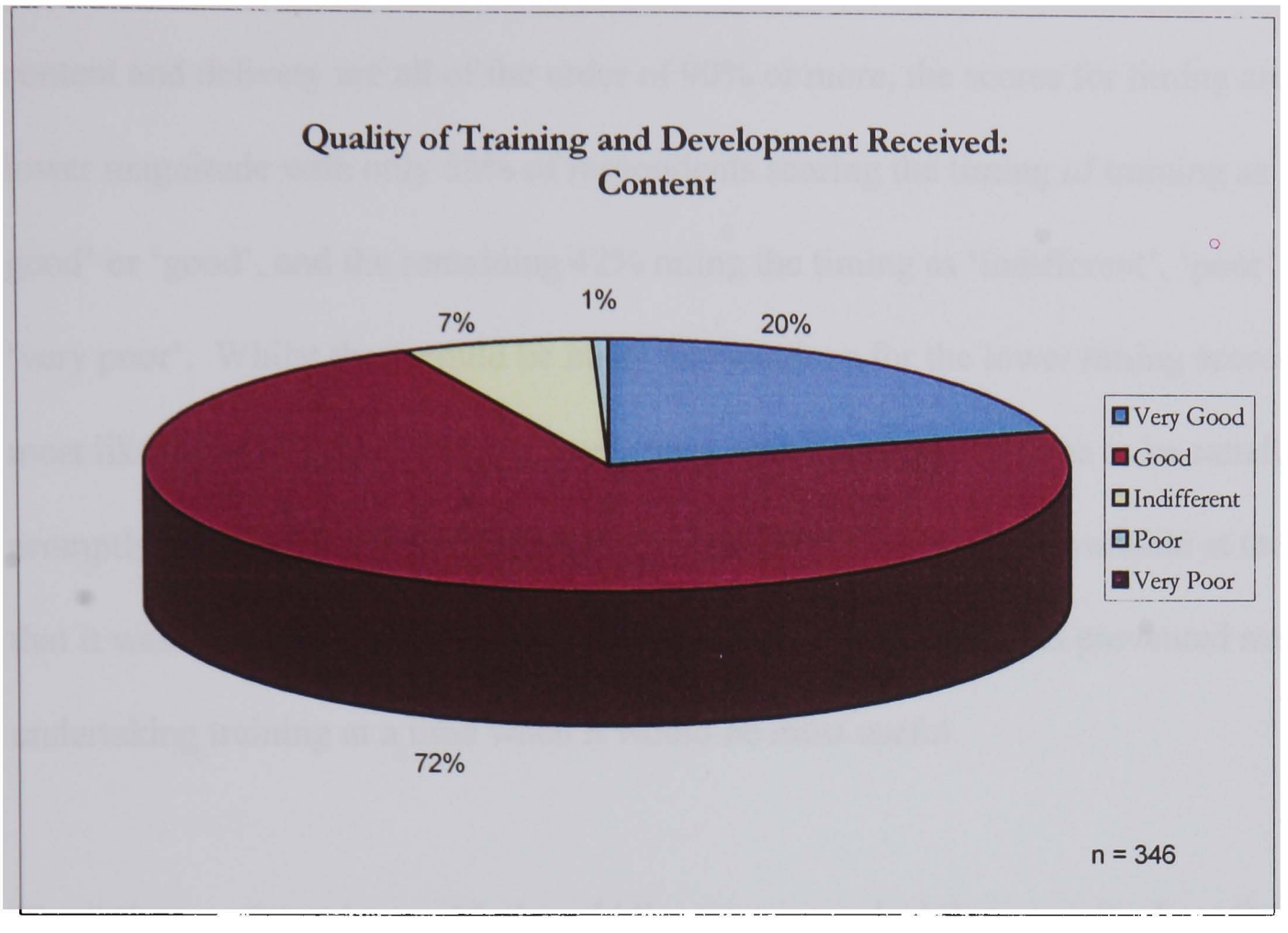


Fig 5.11 Quality of training and development received: content

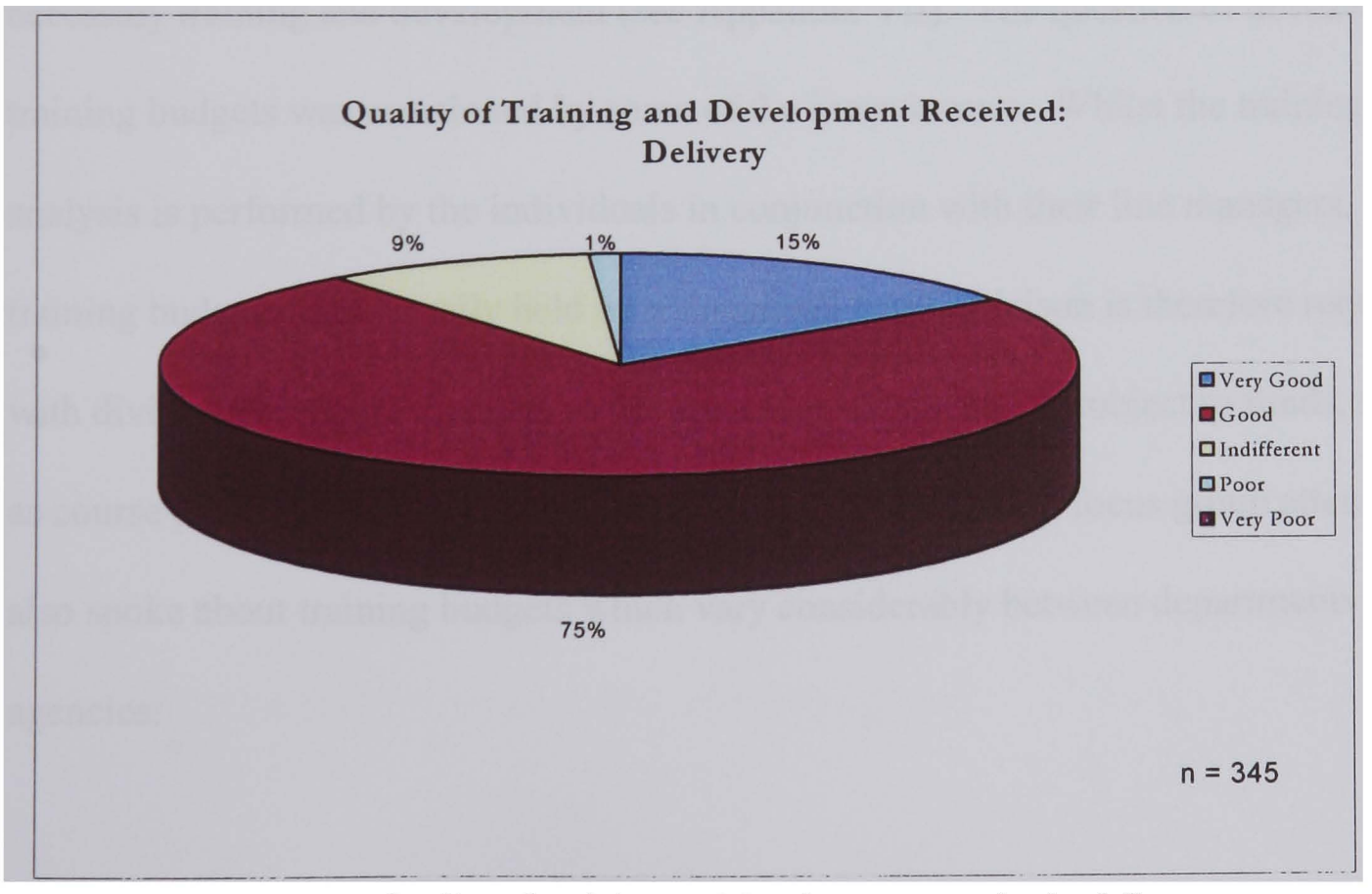


Fig 5.12 Quality of training and development received: delivery

The most interesting point from the information contained in the pie charts shown at figures 5.9 to 5.12 is that whilst the 'very good' and 'good' rating scores for relevance, content and delivery are all of the order of 90% or more, the scores for timing are of a lower magnitude with only 58% of respondents scoring the timing of training as 'very good' or 'good', and the remaining 42% rating the timing as 'indifferent', 'poor' or 'very poor'. Whilst there could be many explanations for the lower timing scores, the most likely reason is that training needs were either analysed too late to be satisfied promptly, or suitable training and development provision was not available at the time that it was required. Another possibility is that work commitments prevented managers undertaking training at a time when it would be most useful.

The follow-up interviews with the middle managers asked them to talk about the systems and procedures in their own organisations which ensure that they receive the necessary training and development (see Appendix VII). The question of devolved training budgets was mentioned by some of the interviewees. Whilst the training needs analysis is performed by the individuals in conjunction with their line managers, training budgets are normally held on a divisional basis. Liaison is therefore required with divisional budget managers to book training events and is subject to funds, as well as course places, being available to satisfy training needs. The focus group attenders also spoke about training budgets which vary considerably between departments and agencies:

> "We have a training budget of £90 per person a year"
>
> "Our training budget is 5% of staff costs"

"There is £800 per person for training"

Although most of the interviewees expressed overall satisfaction with the systems in their own organisations to book training courses, one of them was very critical of the modular approach to training provision. He said,

"Need to know sums up the attitude towards training. The training has been broken up so much it destroys the core value that you get from it. We are the face of Government, we are here to implement government policy. You don't get that by knowing how to press a particular knob on the computer".

This observation about the duration of training events could provide another explanation for the lower timing scores because some of the survey respondents may have interpreted this question as referring to course length rather than the time that the training took place. One of the other middle managers interviewed was critical of the four and a half day courses held at the Civil Service College. His feeling was that the half day was not cost effective for students given the drive for value for money from training events in departments and agencies. This is a point that the College may wish to consider when designing future courses and is one that has already been taken into account in offering more modular type training provision.

One of the focus group participants confirmed that training needs now have to be met more flexibly:

"You have to be more flexible about how you develop because there is less money for traditional training courses and you have to find other ways of learning a job"

Certainly most of the negative comments from the interviewees about the quality of training and development provision in their own organisations are directed towards the way that their developmental needs are being satisfied. We will be picking up on this point again in the next chapter. The difference in charging mechanisms for training and development activities relates in part to whether training is provided internally or externally and it is an important determinant of how training strategy operates in departments and agencies. We will now turn our attention to this consideration.

Internal and External Training Provision

In the "how" of training strategy, the training function has to decide the range of training and development activities it will undertake, and the mix of in-house and external courses (Holbeche, 1999c, p.19). Holbeche says that the current skill levels and availability of internal trainers, and the needs of trainees to be exposed to other experiences and approaches will form the basis of these decisions. One of the recommendations of the Fulton Report (HMSO, 1968, p.105) which proposed the establishment of the Civil Service College included the statement, "the courses provided by the College should not be restricted to civil servants; a proportion of places should be set aside for men and women from private industrial and commercial firms, local government and public corporations". The cross-fertilisation of ideas and experiences that comes from this approach is an important consideration for people booking onto courses. The College's target of 900 private sector students on courses in

the 1998/1999 year was surpassed by 89 students and the Management Development Group has been undertaking an increasing volume of work with Local Authorities (Civil Service College, 1999, p.8 and p.13).

The review of the Civil Service College (Cabinet Office, 1998e) saw the new Centre for Management and Policy Studies as being at the heart of Government with at its core "a high level team providing the driving force behind delivery of the corporate agenda" and other parts of the College "reshaped into an in-house training and development wing of the Centre" with a portfolio "re-designed primarily to meet the corporate needs of the Civil Service, rather than the needs of specific Departments or Agencies, with mechanisms (at design, delivery and evaluation) to involve Departments and the Cabinet Office to ensure that corporate needs are met...." (p.8). Whilst the review states that there will be some corporate responsibility to ensure the take up of corporate programmes, other demand will be market driven and tailored programmes will be offered to departments and agencies on a commercial basis (p.9). The Centre will "help to address the corporate development needs of junior staff" and by reaching beyond the Civil Service to wider issues, encourage links with the wider public sector, "developing programmes which address the cross sector linkages...." and making use of "the full range of potential learning processes, and not focus excessively on traditional courses". It will arrange the delivery of learning opportunities and development and training programmes through either independent providers or its own in-house capacity (p.7).

The Civil Service College is only one external training provider to the decentralised departments and agencies, and its 450 residential courses are in competition with training events offered by business schools and colleges, and private suppliers. CSC

courses include senior Civil Service training and development events, and courses on business management, management and personal development, the policy environment, Europe, professional qualifications and continuing professional development, and skills for specialists (Civil Service College, 1998, p.i). Departments and agencies also organise their own in-house training courses. The Cabinet Office, for example, offers courses on performance appraisal, managing sick absence, managing performance, interviewing, interpersonal skills, presentation skills, records appraisal, records management, moving jobs, induction, IT induction and management courses for newly promoted managers (Cabinet Office, 1999d).

71% of survey respondents indicated that they had attended internal training courses, compared to 85% who had attended external training events (see table 5.6). As Civil Service College courses are mainly residential, the advantages and disadvantages of residential versus non-residential training have to be considered so that the relatively higher costs of residential training can be justified by specific objectives, such as the development of networks (Holbeche, 1999c, p.19). The middle managers who were interviewed confirmed that networking was a major benefit of residential events, whether these are arranged internally or externally. One manager said of a development scheme that he was on:

> "When I was an HEO in the department we had a development scheme. It was limited to 20 participants and we had to go through a two day assessment centre to get on the scheme. The main benefit that I got from that was the network because we had people from different bits within the department that came together. We had one or two hard

training events going off to a hotel for a couple of days and doing activities. There was also linking between the events and there was a lot of mutual support between individuals. That scheme has fallen by the wayside now. The department decided that it wasn't getting much from it and wasn't prepared to fund it any longer".

The benefits of networking then should not be undervalued; many students attending Civil Service College courses continue to meet regularly after the event, some forming informal mutual support groups. A number of the middle managers interviewed also indicated that meeting people from other departments and agencies and finding out about their experiences was a major benefit of going on a CSC course.

CHAPTER SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Unlike the review of corporate training strategy undertaken in Chapter 4, this chapter has sought to explain how the plans to improve training and development in Civil Service departments and agencies, as required by the White Paper (HMSO, 1996), are being put into place on the ground. It is clear from the research findings that the messages contained in *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996) have failed to be communicated to a large proportion of civil servants. Whilst there was more awareness of local training strategies, nearly a third of middle managers surveyed still felt that that they had been inadequately trained and developed to deal with changes to their jobs resulting from the organisational strategy. This is a powerful indication that training strategy is not linking to organisational strategy in the decentralised organisations of the Civil Service.

The research has revealed process shortfalls in the way that training and development needs are identified and in the methods for satisfying these needs. This chapter has again highlighted the crucial role of the line manager in supporting the training and development activities of their staff. However, other managerial pressures associated with the achievement of organisational objectives often get in the way of managers discharging their role responsibly. These findings are consistent with those of Rainbird (1994, p.87) where she says "business and HR strategies may have conflicting rationales, with business strategies taking priority" and "line managers may be ill-prepared to take on responsibilities for HR planning". The "it is a business first, staff management second, philosophy around here" quote from one of the middle managers sums up the feelings of many of the civil servants who were interviewed. We have seen too how the annual appraisal process is the main way in which development and training is planned in departments and agencies and that traditional training methods such as courses continue to be the most popular ones. The learning revolution (Massie, 1999, p.32) appears therefore to still be a long way in the future for civil servants.

We move now to the look in detail at the mechanisms outlined in *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996) which have been specifically designed to try and link training strategy to organisational strategy in this case study.

CHAPTER 6

LINKING ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGY AND TRAINING STRATEGY IN THE CIVIL SERVICE

THE NEED FOR LINKING MECHANISMS

WHAT THE LITERATURE SAYS: A BRIEF REMINDER

In Chapter 1 we looked at the problems of linking organisational strategy and training strategy, giving particular attention to the specific challenges faced by decentralised organisations. Critical academic comment has been made on the prospects for strategic HRM in organisational structures where decentralised accountabilities for business performance encourage a pragmatic approach towards people management (Ahlstrand and Purcell, 1988; Purcell, 1989; Legge, 1989), and how the intrinsic management challenges of passing down HRM responsibilities make local HRM implementation difficult (Rainbird, 1994; Sisson, 1995). The last chapter has already highlighted the effect of some of these problems in this case study, with particular regard to the line management role of civil servants working in departments and agencies. We have seen too how the Civil Service is currently starting to move back from decentralisation to a more corporate approach to organisational and training strategy as part of its *Modernising Government* agenda (The Stationery Office, 1999). The emphasis on creating a strong culture aimed at uniting people through a shared set of managerially sanctioned values fits with HRM theory (Legge, 1989, p.38) and can be seen in the recent Civil Service developments described in Chapter 4. This 'new agenda', however, is still in the process of emerging and the focus of this case study is on the

attempts to link organisational strategy and training strategy through the *Development and Training for Civil Servants* White Paper (HMSO, 1996) which is still presently widely accepted as the current, albeit somewhat outdated, training strategy of the Civil Service.

We have seen too in Chapter 4 how the corporate training strategy as outlined in the White Paper (HMSO, 1996) has developed and how if reflects the business-led approach to HRD strategy development described by Harrison (1997, p.37-38). The Civil Service has used its training strategy as described *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996) as part of the process of linking HRD strategy to organisational strategy in its decentralised departments and agencies, using specific linking mechanisms designed to try and ensure that the approach to producing HRD plans at business unit level as described by Harrison (1997, p.41-42) is followed. These linking mechanisms will be described in detail below in order to answer the specific research question "what are the linking mechanisms and how do they work?". The next sub-section will explore the aim of the White Paper (HMSO, 1996) in this respect in more detail before we move to subsequent sections on each of the linking mechanisms, and another section which evaluates further how the mechanisms are working in practice.

PUTTING THE WHITE PAPER TO THE TEST

The programme for action on training and development set out in the *Development and Training for Civil Servants* White Paper contains three key elements: one is a commitment to the Investors in People standard; two is a new drive to raise the levels of skills and awareness of staff at all levels across the Civil Service; and three is the

aim of giving individual civil servants more confidence and ability to be responsible for their own development and careers (HMSO, 1996, p.3-6). These elements are the linking mechanisms selected by the Government to try and ensure that the civil servants working in the decentralised departments and agencies are equipped and trained to meet the challenge of change inherent in the organisational strategy as contained in *Continuity and Change* (HMSO, 1994). The organisational strategy of the Civil Service has been described in full in Chapter 3.

Development and Training for Civil Servants (HMSO, 1996, p.8) states that, "Cabinet Office (OPS) will also be responsible for reviewing overall progress against the objectives set out in this White Paper and will prepare an annual report to Ministers on the collective performance of the Civil Service, which will be published". The first *Report on Implementation Action Plans Produced by Departments and Agencies* (Cabinet Office, 1997c) was produced in January 1997 and was followed by a limited reporting exercise in July of that same year (Cabinet Office, 1997d). The findings of the 1997/98 reporting exercise were published in December 1998 (Cabinet Office, 1998f). There are therefore three published documents which test at a corporate level the progress that has been made in departments and agencies in implementing the training and development strategy as set out in the *Development and Training for Civil Servants* White Paper (HMSO, 1996).

Whilst these documents will be used as valuable source of evidence in this chapter in its review of the linking mechanisms, progress towards the aims of the White Paper will be tested by using the views of middle managers concerning the way in which these mechanisms are working in practice in their own departments and agencies. The

hypothesis that is being tested in this chapter is that when linking organistional strategy and training strategy the linking mechanisms selected in the training strategy need to be compatible with the organisational strategy and complementary and compatible with one another. Each of the next three sections describes the linking mechanisms and how they are working in departments and agencies, testing the hypothesis against the evidence as we proceed, and the final section will evaluate the mechanisms in more detail.

INVESTING IN PEOPLE

THE INVESTORS IN PEOPLE STANDARD

The target set in *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996, p.3) was that, "by the year 2000, all civil servants will be employed in organisations recognised as Investors in People" with two intermediate milestones that, "by 1 April 1997, 65% of civil servants will be working in organisations which are either recognised as Investors in People or are committed to achieving the Standard against a formal action plan" and "by 1 April 1998, all civil servants will be working in organisations which are either recognised as Investors in People or are committed to achieving the Standard against a formal action plan" (p.4).

The Investors in People (IiP) scheme originated from the National Training Task Force which was established to raise employer commitment to training, and the IiP programme was launched to help companies ask and answer questions for themselves related to the management, development and use of people in a way that will directly contribute to improved performance and organisational success (Critten, 1993, p.22). The IiP standard "provides a framework for improving business performance and

competitiveness, through best practice in human resource development" and is promoted and developed by Investors in People UK, part funded by the Department for Education and Employment. Although Investors in People UK are responsible for setting the Standard and monitoring quality, the actual delivery of IiP in England and Wales is through the Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) and the Local Enterprise Companies (LECs) in Scotland, and the Training and Employment Agency (T&EA) in Northern Ireland (Luxford, 1999, p.29).

The IiP standard sets out 24 quality criteria based on four interdependent areas of activity, against which the organisation's position is reviewed (Mason, 1995, p.5). The four principles of:

- "commitment to investing in people to achieve organisational goals"
- "planning how skills of individuals and teams are to be developed to achieve these goals"
- "action to develop and use necessary skills in a well-defined and continuing programme"
- "evaluation of progress towards goals, value achieved and future needs"

are implicit in the standard and are outlined in *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996, p.9). IiP is called a National Standard because the principles and action points it embodies are thought to have relevance to every employer in the UK (Alberga, Tyson and Parsons, 1997, p.49).

Organisations seeking recognition as an Investor in People are externally assessed against the 24 Indicators of the standards, and the involvement of line managers is

critical to the successful implementation of the IiP process (Mason, 1995, p.5-9). An IiP organisation regularly reviews the training and development needs of all employees and managers should be responsible for regularly agreeing needs with each employee in the context of business objectives; action should also be taken to train and develop individuals on recruitment and throughout their employment with all employees encouraged to contribute to identifying and meeting their own job-related development needs. The investment in training and development should be evaluated to assess achievement and improve future effectiveness (Alberga, Tyson and Parsons, 1997, p.49). Becoming an Investor in People moreover involves:

- "understanding the Standard and its business benefits
- making the commitment to achieve the Standard and communicating that to all employees
- diagnosing the gaps between current practice and the Standard
- planning and taking action to ensure that principles become part of the culture of the organisation
- and evaluating progress towards goals, identifying future needs, and working to keep the culture of continuous improvement alive" (Luxford, 1999, p.29).

Although IiP seeks to operationalise HR strategy and demonstrate how training strategy should be linked to business strategy resulting in positive perceptions of the impact of HRD on organisational performance in IiP companies (Alberga, Tyson and Parsons, 1997, p.47), not all senior HR commentators are convinced about the standard's credibility, and some are waiting to assess the impact of the new standard (Rana, 1999b, p.15). Once organisations are assessed and have met the standard, they can be publicly

recognised as an Investor in People, with reassessment three years later to ensure the standard is being maintained (Luxford, 1999, p.29).

Development and Training for Civil Servants (HMSO,1996, p.9) wanted every department and agency to work towards the IiP standard because the Government regarded it as, "a proven, practical way of targeting an organisation's training and development activity in line with its overall objectives" and because

> "It has been designed by employers and is based on existing best practice, against which organisations (both public and private) can be assessed. It offers Civil Service organisations the opportunity to obtain objective recognition of their commitment to the focused training and development of their staff".

The progress that has been made in achieving the standard in departments and agencies is described in the next sub-section.

PROGRESS IN ACHIEVING INVESTORS IN PEOPLE IN DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES

Organisations generally take from six months to two years to prepare submissions for IiP, and by March 1996, a total of 3,514 organisations employing 1.1 million employees (5% of the UK workforce) had achieved the award, and 18,367 organisations employing 4.1 million employees (19% of the UK workforce) were working towards it (The Industrial Society, 1996). The first *Report on Implementation Action Plans Produced by Departments and Agencies* (Cabinet Office, 1997c, p.3) recorded that at 30 September 1996 13% of civil servants were working in IiP recognised organisations and

33% were working in organisations committed to IiP, an increase of 11% since March 1996 when the figures for the Civil Service compared favourably with those for the economy as a whole. The *Update on Key White Paper Statistics* reported that at 1 April 1997, a total of 63% of civil servants were employed in organisations which were either recognised as Investors in People or were formally committed to achieving the standard and that, "informal talks with departments and agencies suggest that the Civil Service has now met the interim target of 65%" (Cabinet Office, 1997d, p.4).

The survey questionnaire that was sent out to middle managers at the end of 1997 asked them at question 25 (see Appendix IV) what progress their department or agency had made towards becoming an Investor in People. Their responses are shown at figure 6.1.

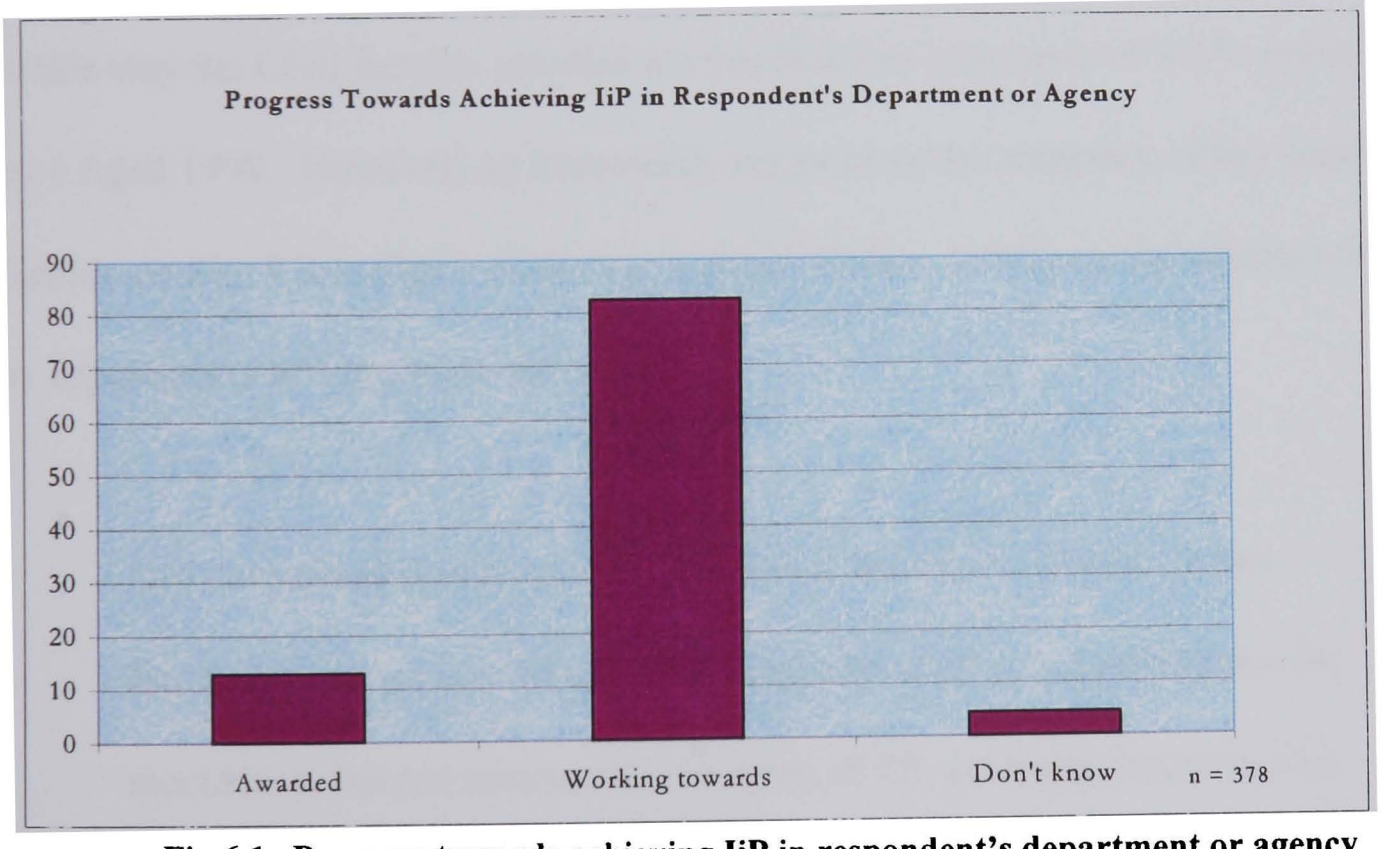


Fig 6.1 Progress towards achieving IiP in respondent's department or agency

13% of middle managers responded that their department or agency had been awarded IiP, 82.5% that their organisation was working towards IiP and 4.5% did not know what progress had been made. The total of 95.5% of middle managers either working in

organisations that are recognised or working towards the IiP standard is an increase on the April 1997 figures but broadly in line with the position reported at 1 April 1998 (Cabinet Office, 1998f, p.2) which was that a total of 98% of civil servants were working in recognised or formally committed organisations. The *Update on Key White Paper Statistics* (Cabinet Office, 1998f) states that:

> "Since 1 April 1998, the overall total has risen to close to 100%. The shortfall is caused by organisations or units which restructure and are then obliged to recommit. The Civil Service position compares well with the economy as a whole, where the figures at August 1998 were 12.8% recognised and 21% formally committed" (p.2).

In this way the Civil Service satisfies the intermediate milestone of 100% commitment by 1 April 1998. However, an interesting comment in the summary of key issues in the *Update on Key White Paper Statistics* (Cabinet Office, 1998f) on the returns submitted by departments and agencies states that:

> "IiP dominated returns as the main driver for improvement. It also featured as an excuse for late or incomplete returns, suggesting that the mechanics, but not necessarily the spirit of IiP, are being implemented across the Service. Indeed, the White Paper monitoring requirements, which are an integral part of IiP are seen as an additional burden by some departments and agencies".

This observation speaks volumes about the way that IiP is being implemented in departments and agencies as we shall see when we move now to look at what the middle managers say about how Investors in People has affected them and their jobs.

WHAT THE MIDDLE MANAGERS SAY

The Glasgow Collection of HM Customs and Excise was the first central government organisation to be recognised as an Investor in People on 6 October 1993 (Cabinet Office, 1994b, p.3). One of the quotes from the Training and Development Officer in a case study document (Cabinet Office, 1994b) about the Customs and Excise experience is worth making here, "seek to develop, from the start, a real commitment by every manager to the concept that the performance of their team is dependent upon their success in developing and using the human talent they employ. It is their most valuable asset" (p.17). We have already acknowledged that line managers are critical to the successful implementation of IiP, gaining their understanding and commitment therefore needs to be a top priority (Mason, 1995, p.9).

The middle managers who completed the survey questionnaire were asked at question 26 to state, if their department or agency had achieved IiP or was working towards it, what effect this had had on their job. A quantitative analysis of their responses, by grade, is given at table 6.1.

EFFECT ON JOB	PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS REPORTING EFFECT ON JOB BY GRADE			
	Grade 7	SEO	HEO	TOTAL
Increased training and development opportunities	9	5	4	5
More emphasis on appraisal process	15	8	6	8
Increased use of training needs analysis	9	10	12	11
Increased focus on training evaluation	9	2	3	4
Improved communication	4	7	7	6
More paperwork	9	20	11	12
Involvement in accreditation process	17	5	5	7
Formalised existing procedures	6	5	5	5
No effect on job	28	33	39	36

n = 293

TABLE 6.1 The effect of Investors in People on the jobs of middle managers

The most surprising finding from this analysis is that a total of 36% of respondents stated that IiP had had no effect on their job and the percentage response was grade related. Whilst accepting that some departments and agencies were still in the early stages of preparing for Investors in People, given the key role of line managers in implementing the IiP process, this result is more than a little disconcerting. In this sub-section therefore we shall examine in more detail exactly how middle managers say that

their jobs have changed before returning to the key point that over one third of respondents stated that their jobs had changed not at all.

For ease of analysis we will explore the changes under the four stages of the national standard and its criteria as outlined by Mason (1995, p.11-13) namely that:

- "An Investor in People makes a public commitment from the top to develop all employees to achieve the organisation's business objectives"
- "An Investor in People regularly reviews the training and development needs of all employees"
- "An Investor in People takes action to train and develop individuals on recruitment and throughout their employment"
- "An Investor in People evaluates the investment in training and development to assess achievement and improve future effectiveness".

These stages will be numbered (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv) respectively in the discussion that follows.

(i) An Investor in People makes a public commitment from the top to develop all employees to achieve the organisation's business objectives

The criteria for this stage of the standard are that every employer should have a written business plan with consideration given to the contribution made by employees and how development needs will be assessed and met, and that management should communicate a vision of where the organisation is going and the contribution that employees will make to its success. A total of 6% of survey respondents stated that

communication had improved in their organisation as a result of the IiP process. Some of the comments from the survey respondents are as follows:

> "The IiP process requires regular and proactive communication between individuals and managers"

> "There are more meetings and other communication between staff within my area and with senior management"

> "I read circulars and have been involved in some discussions with staff and managers about IiP"

> "Involvement in improving communications has become part of my job. I do a lot of work in raising awareness with directors about issues such as communications, SMART targets, business planning etc."

> "IiP has raised awareness about the agency's mission statement, business objectives and the benefits of regular appraisal reviews and evaluation"

> "Regular section staff meetings are carried out within our section to make us more aware of current departmental work"

One of the benefits of IiP as outlined in *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996, p.11) is that in departments and agencies which are working towards the

award there has been an increasing recognition of the importance of effective communication with staff to help them understand the organisation's values, priorities and objectives and how their own work fits into these. It is therefore somewhat disappointing that there were not more comments from survey respondents about improved communication in their own organisations. However, considering the lack of awareness about changing business objectives that was identified in Chapter 3 on organisational strategy (see figures 3.2 and 3.3) this result is to be expected. In that chapter we looked at how departmental and agency business objectives are communicated to managers and staff, and the lessons that can be learnt about meaningful communication processes. Although departments and agencies would be able to satisfy the IiP assessor that a business plan exists, from what the middle managers say there is clearly less clarity about its contents. It is no coincidence that one of the series of recommendations from the Civil Service Management Committee in connection with the *Modernising Government* agenda (The Stationery Office, 1999) is on the subject of communication and change management.

(ii) An Investor in People regularly reviews the training and development needs of all employees

This stage of the standard requires that the resources for training and developing employees should be clearly identified in the business plan and that managers should be responsible for regularly agreeing training and development needs of employees in the context of business objectives, setting targets and standards for developmental actions, linked, where appropriate, to the achievement of National Vocational Qualifications and in Scotland, Scottish Vocational Qualifications. A total of 11% of survey respondents volunteered the fact that there had been an increased use of training needs

analysis as a result of IiP. A further 8% reported that there was more emphasis on the appraisal process in their jobs which, as we saw in the previous chapter, is the main method for planning development and training in departments and agencies (see figure 5.7). The reservations that were expressed in that chapter about the obstacles that need to be overcome to help line managers effectively undertake this role will not be restated here. However, again, some of the comments from the survey respondents are interesting:

> "More emphasis is now given to appraisal and in particular its role in identifying training and development needs"

> "Appraisal is now more relevant and it builds in personal development planning. My team all have personal development plans which is part of working towards IiP"

> "I am more focused on training needs at reviews. There is more requirement to discuss business objectives with staff"

> "We have redesigned appraisal forms, built in personal development plans, and changed promotion marking focus into a mini CV of skills. A lot of attention has been paid to this formal process"

> "Staff are encouraged to complete annual development plans based on self assessment of the skills needed for the work and areas where further development is needed"

> "More attention is given to immediate training needs, but not to general career development"

This last point about training needs being reviewed against business objectives rather than career development is one that was reiterated by a number of managers, both in their comments on the survey questionnaire and as part of the follow-up interviews. Interviewees were asked a series of questions about IiP (see Appendix VII). Whilst a number agreed with the survey respondents that the standard had had little effect on their jobs, most were clear that training and development is now more focused on helping people achieve business objectives. The following quote from one of the interviewees is typical:

> "I think with IiP we are now much more focused on making sure that staff go on courses which are appropriate to them at the appropriate time, making sure that the training is used. In the past we had a tendency to send people on courses that in general were good for them to go on, and therefore one tended to say, "you have done this one, you have done that one".

Whilst the question remains about the clarity of business objectives as they are communicated down the organisational hierarchy, particularly in times of rapid and fundamental change, most interviewees indicated that their personal development plans, where they exist, are linked to the achievement of devolved operational targets. A quote from a senior line manager who was interviewed makes this point well:

"Investors in People does help. It makes us much more focused on why we are doing particular bits of training and development, how they relate to the business needs, and what we are going to get out of that particular training. I think business planning if it is done properly is a particularly important tool for that, it should be about what you have got to deliver and what skills and people you need to deliver. But it also means looking at what you have got and filling the gap. We are not very good at that yet. Locally people might do it but as a department we don't do it well enough. We need to do it better"

Locally identifying group and individual gaps in skill, knowledge and attitudes which it is essential to close in order to meet business targets is an integral part of producing HRD plans at unit level (Harrison, 1997, p.42).

We shall be returning to this question of how well this step is undertaken in departments and agencies later in this chapter when we look at the raising levels of skills and awareness element of *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996). We will also return to the developmental issues when we discuss the managing development and careers linking mechanism. Meanwhile, we shall move to the next stage of the IiP standard.

(iii) An Investor in People takes action to train and develop individuals on recruitment and throughout their employment

In satisfying this stage of the standard an organisation is required to demonstrate that action is focused on the training needs of all new recruits and the development and skills improvement of all existing employees who should be encouraged to contribute to identifying and meeting their own job-related development needs. Only 5% of survey respondents, however, reported that training and development opportunities had increased in their own organisation as a result of IiP. Some were in fact critical of the affect of IiP in their department and agency:

> "Training is worse. I applied for further assistance from our staff training branch for external training for a French BA and was rejected even though they had funded earlier years of it before IiP"

> "IiP has made training funds less available; there are now many hoops to go through before it is authorised"

> "There is greater emphasis on training and development and induction training for the people working to me, but not for me as an individual"

One of the middle managers who was interviewed was particularly sceptical:

> "The greatest joke of it all is the IiP. Every department is required to acquire the IiP. Yes we do acquire the IiP; there are ways of acquiring it. Any manager who is worth his salt can acquire the IiP but it is not worth

the paper it is written on. So I send someone to do Microsoft training and they come back – so what? I send someone to the Civil Service College for one week to improve themselves in managing something or other, and they come back to work and go back on the counter. We go through the processes of IiP. I believe there should be a complete and outright development plan. There should be an end product which you can identify at the end of the training package for an individual".

Others though felt that there had been improvements, particularly in induction training:

"I am more aware of learning opportunities"

"Management are less willing to cut the training budget. We are generally more focused on the objectives of training"

"There are more in-house training courses"

"I have been involved in developing an induction package but the work has been taken on over and above my normal job description"

Many survey respondents commented on the increased workload attached to IiP and this was at a time when their jobs were already heavily loaded. A total of 12% indicated that there had been an increase in paperwork and 7% were involved in the IiP accreditation process. The following comments are typical:

"I have been trained as an IiP adviser and I am now working on the action plan. I will be responsible for ensuring we attain the standard"

"There are more forms to fill in"

"There has been very little effect other than developing a personal plan, training plan, corporate plan etc. which sit on the shelf"

"I am the IiP Manager for a directorate of 120 plus people in addition to my real job"

"My journalistic and media skills are being buried under mounting, irrelevant paperwork"

> "I have been required to spend much time accounting for training and development actions, that is committing a great deal of ink and paper to making explicit what was implicit"

This apparent increased workload associated with IiP is very important given the point already made in the previous chapter about the increased staff management content of line manager's jobs. As gaining the understanding and commitment of line managers is a top priority (Mason, 1995, p.9) they do need to engage with the process. Some of the comments from the survey questionnaire would suggest that this is far from the case.

(iv) An Investor in People evaluates the investment in training and development to assess achievement and improve future effectiveness

The final stage of the standard involves reviewing the investment, competence and commitment of employees and the use made of skills learned against business goals and targets, with top management review of the effectiveness of training and development leading to renewed commitment and target setting. Fewer survey respondents indicated an increased focus on training evaluation although the percentages varied between grades from 2% for SEOs to 9% for grade 7s. Yet this last criterion with its focus on evidence that training has made a difference is the most critical of all (Critten, 1993, p.25). The direct link to strategic HRD should be obvious here. Although some survey respondents reported good practice with comments like:

> "Evaluation of my team's development and training has become a priority within my personal work plan"

> "We have put an evaluation system in place"

these positive statements were only rarely given.

Overall, there was a lot of cynicism expressed about the IiP process, and whilst some 5% of respondents said that it had not affected their jobs because they were already adopting the standard without formally achieving the award, it therefore merely formalised existing procedures in their organisations, others referred to the practice rather than the theory of IiP:

"IiP has affected my job not at all. The department is supposedly working towards it but lack of resources, volume of work and traditional lack of interest and understanding on the part of senior staff are huge barriers. It is seen as something of a joke"

"It has hardly affected my current job but the previous job was enhanced by it in theory. In practice it was more like lip service"

"There has been minimal effect on my job so far. There is more emphasis on people management but it is more words than action to date"

"IiP has not affected my job. No-one really knows what it means and there is a cynical view that getting the award was more important than achieving the standards that merited it".

Comments like these are worrying given the importance attached to IiP as an organisational strategy and training strategy linking mechanism in *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996). Whilst there can be little doubt that the act of working towards the IiP standards provides focus and direction to organisations that believe in developing their people (Mason, 1995, p.3) and that the more an organisation is involved with IiP the more likely it is to have mission statements, business plans, personnel/HR strategies and formal training budgets (Spilsbury, Atkinson, Hillage and Meager, 1994, p.2), the Investors principles need constant support from managers who are involved in the day-to-day routines of the organisation (Mason, 1995, p.9). If

middle managers see IiP as "something of a joke" either because there is no senior management commitment or they are unable to engage with the spirit of IiP because the process is being applied in a bureaucratic way in their organisations and they are already working in heavily loaded jobs with a lack of time to spend on people management, the standard is unlikely to link training strategy to organisational strategy in the way that is intended.

We shall return to this point again in the last section of this chapter when we evaluate all the linking mechanisms in more detail. For now we will move to the next key element of *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996) namely raising the levels of skills and awareness of civil servants (p.20-36).

RAISING LEVELS OF SKILLS AND AWARENESS

PROFESSIONAL MANAGEMENT TRAINING AND QUALIFICATIONS

"If the Civil Service is to achieve the continuous improvement in performance which the Government is seeking, it will be necessary to raise the levels of skills, awareness and flexibility of staff at all levels across the Service" (HMSO, 1996, p.20). The White Paper (HMSO, 1996, p.20-21) specifies four areas where action is required in departments and agencies in order to meet this objective:

- the continuing development of a stronger managerial culture with more professional management training and qualifications
- more emphasis on the use and development of civil servants with specialist expertise

- a sustained commitment to awareness training and development opportunities to help staff understand the environment in which they are working and keep abreast of external developments
- and a flexible approach to recruitment, particularly at senior levels.

This sub-section will focus on the first of these areas, namely the emphasis on developing more professional management training and qualifications in the Civil Service to help deliver the stronger managerial culture necessary for the continuous improvement in performance envisaged by the organisational strategy. We will move on to discuss the second and third areas of this aspect of the training strategy in subsequent sub-sections.

The organisational strategy has been described fully in Chapter 3 of this thesis and the White Paper (HMSO, 1996, p.23) sees the changes which have been outlined in that chapter as requiring "all managers and those aspiring to be managers to acquire new and better developed skills". Whilst welcoming the development of competency frameworks in departments and agencies, and the linking of core competencies to the Management Charter Initiative's (MCI) Management Standards which underpin National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) in management, and the acquisition of general business skills and other managerial qualifications by civil servants, the White Paper (HMSO, 1996, p.23-25) wishes to see these initiatives given further impetus. In this way therefore the Civil Service is seeking to use the pursuit of professional management qualifications as a way of linking training strategy to organisational strategy.

Civil servants of course already hold a variety of qualifications. The survey questionnaire used in this case study asked respondents at question 13 (see Appendix IV) what educational or vocational qualifications they held above GCE 'O' level or Scottish qualification equivalent on joining the Civil Service. Their responses are given at figure 6.2.

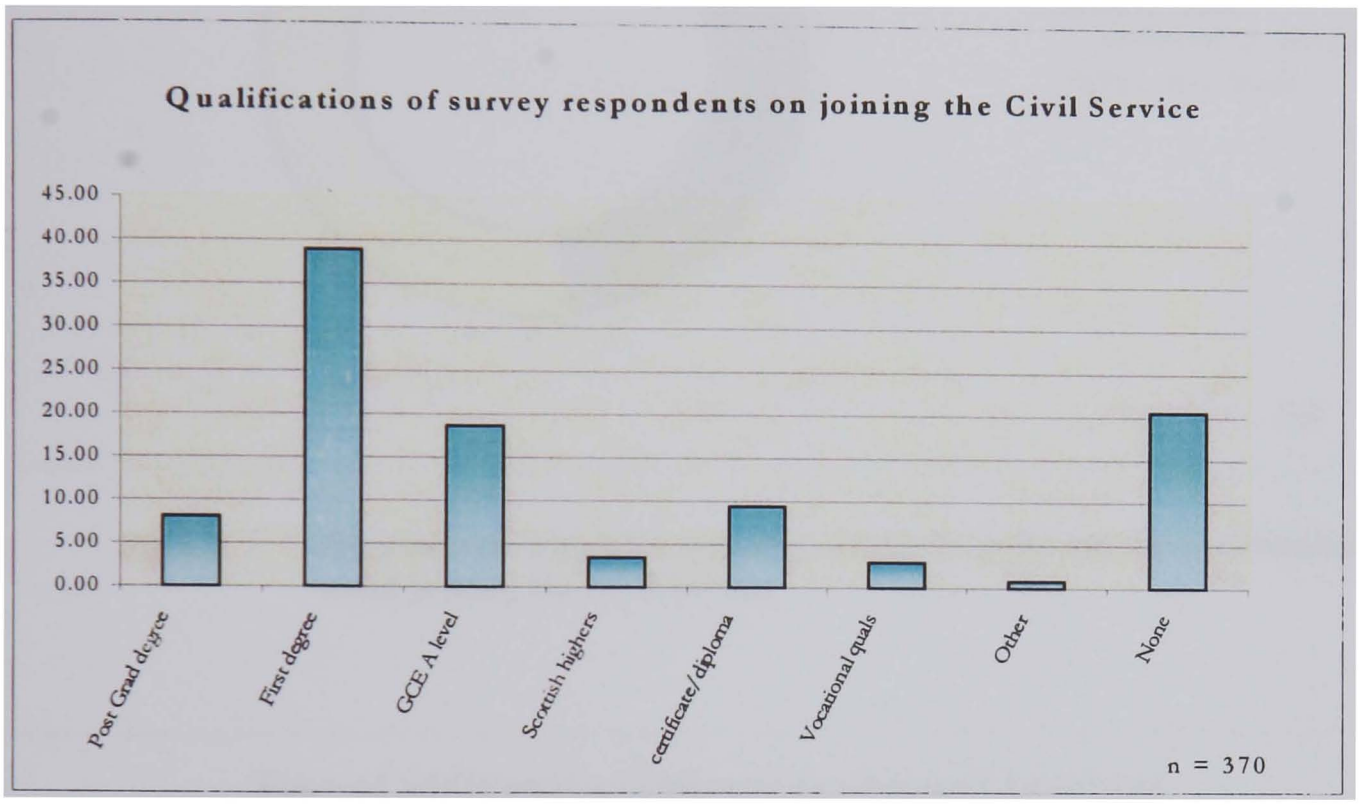


Fig 6.2 Qualifications of survey respondents on joining the Civil Service

Although respondents were not asked to explain the subjects covered by their qualifications it can be seen that with nearly 40% of respondents holding a first degree the skill base of middle managers surveyed is not insignificant and this skill base is increasing. Question 14 on the questionnaire asked respondents if they had obtained any additional job relevant qualifications since joining the Civil Service and if so, what qualifications had been obtained. Their responses are shown at figures 6.3 and 6.4.

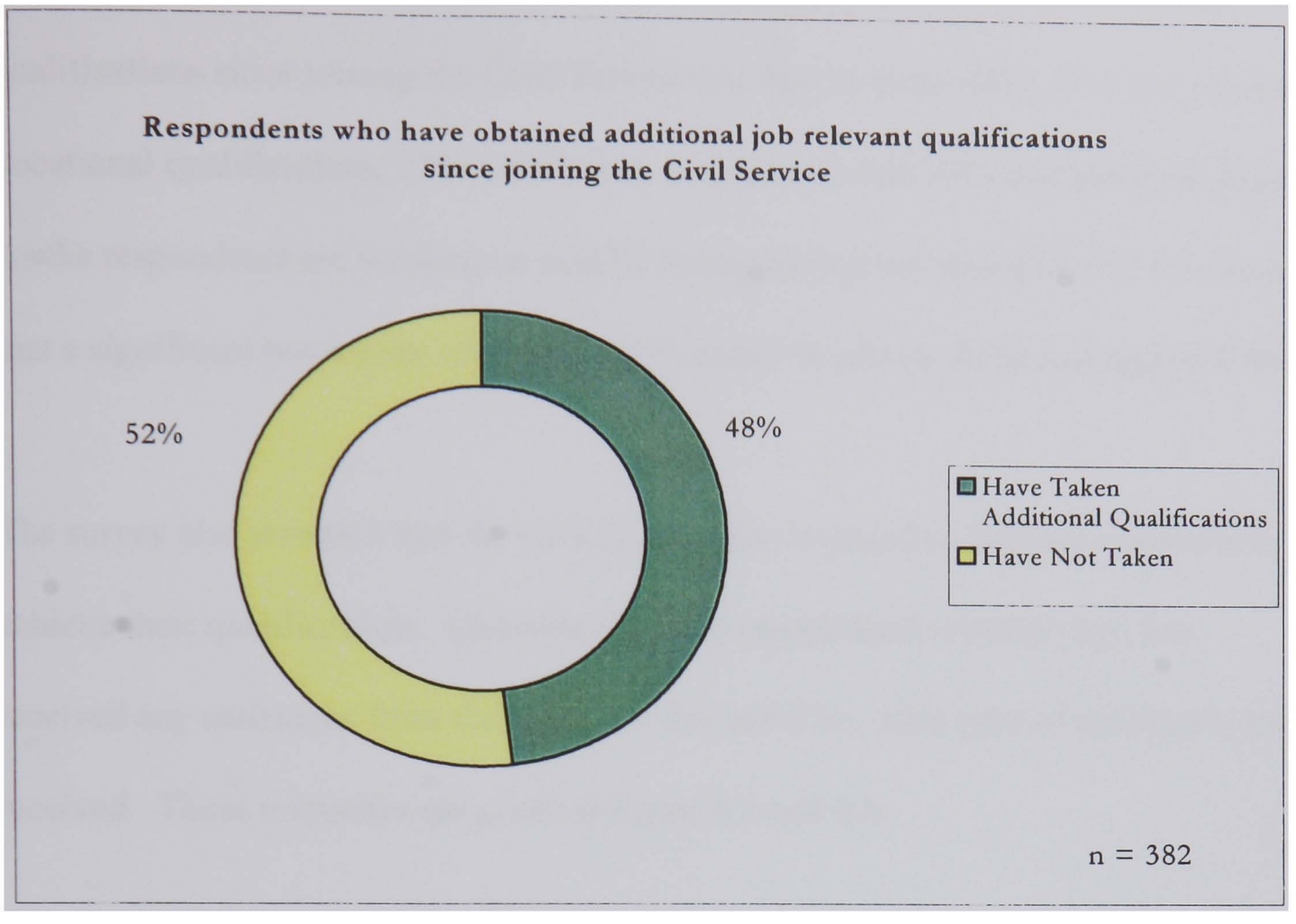


Fig 6.3 Respondents who have obtained additional job relevant qualifications since joining the Civil Service

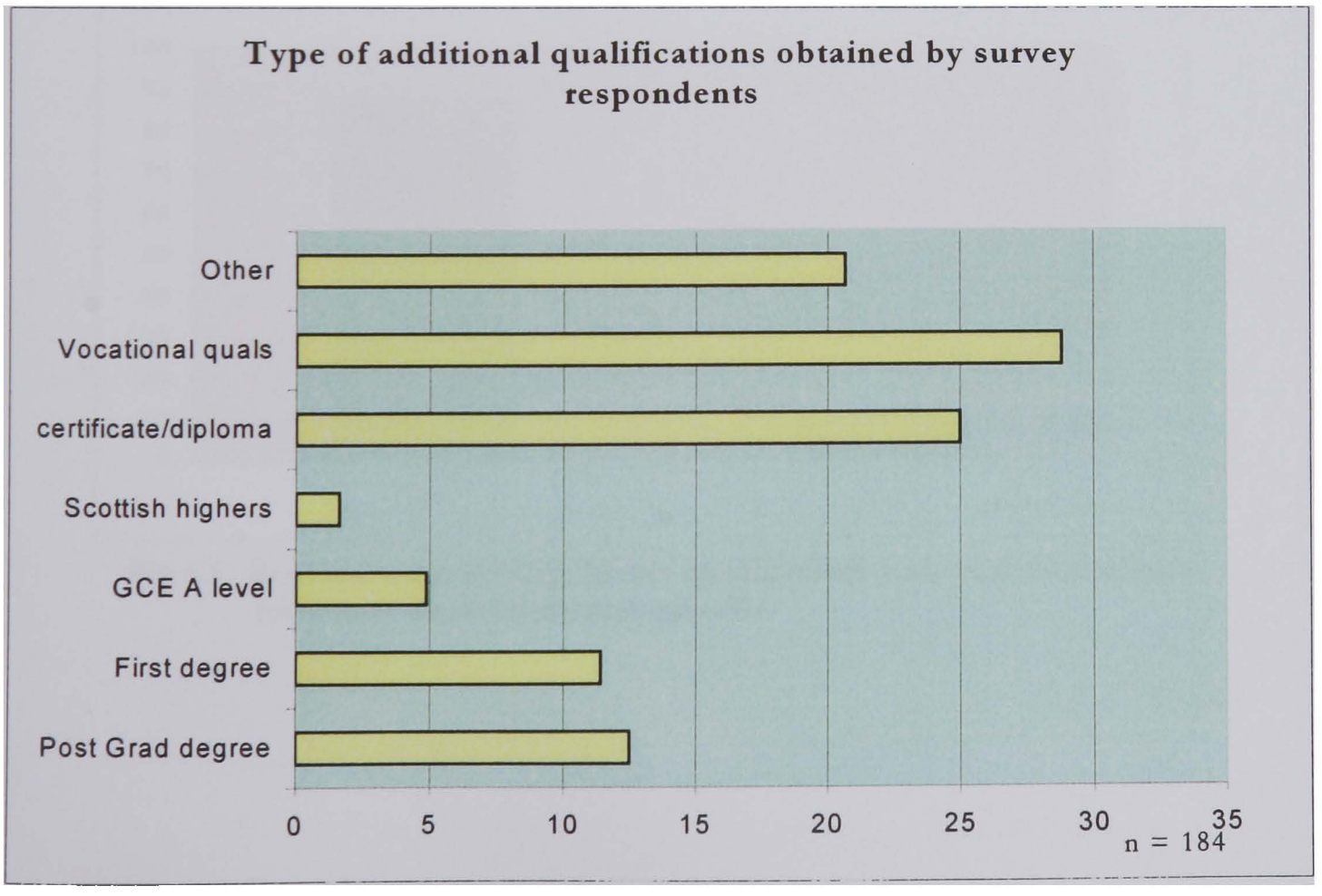


Fig 6.4 Type of additional qualifications obtained by survey respondents

Figure 6.3 shows that nearly half of the survey respondents had taken additional qualifications since joining the Civil Service and that of these 48%, 29% had obtained vocational qualifications, 25% certificates or diplomas, and 13% postgraduate degrees. As the respondents are working as middle managers it is not unreasonable to assume that a significant percentage of these qualifications would be in the management field.

The survey also revealed that the Civil Service has invested in helping respondents achieve their qualifications. Question 15 asked respondents whether they had received any assistance from the Civil Service and if so, what type of assistance was received. These responses are given at figure 6.5 and 6.6.

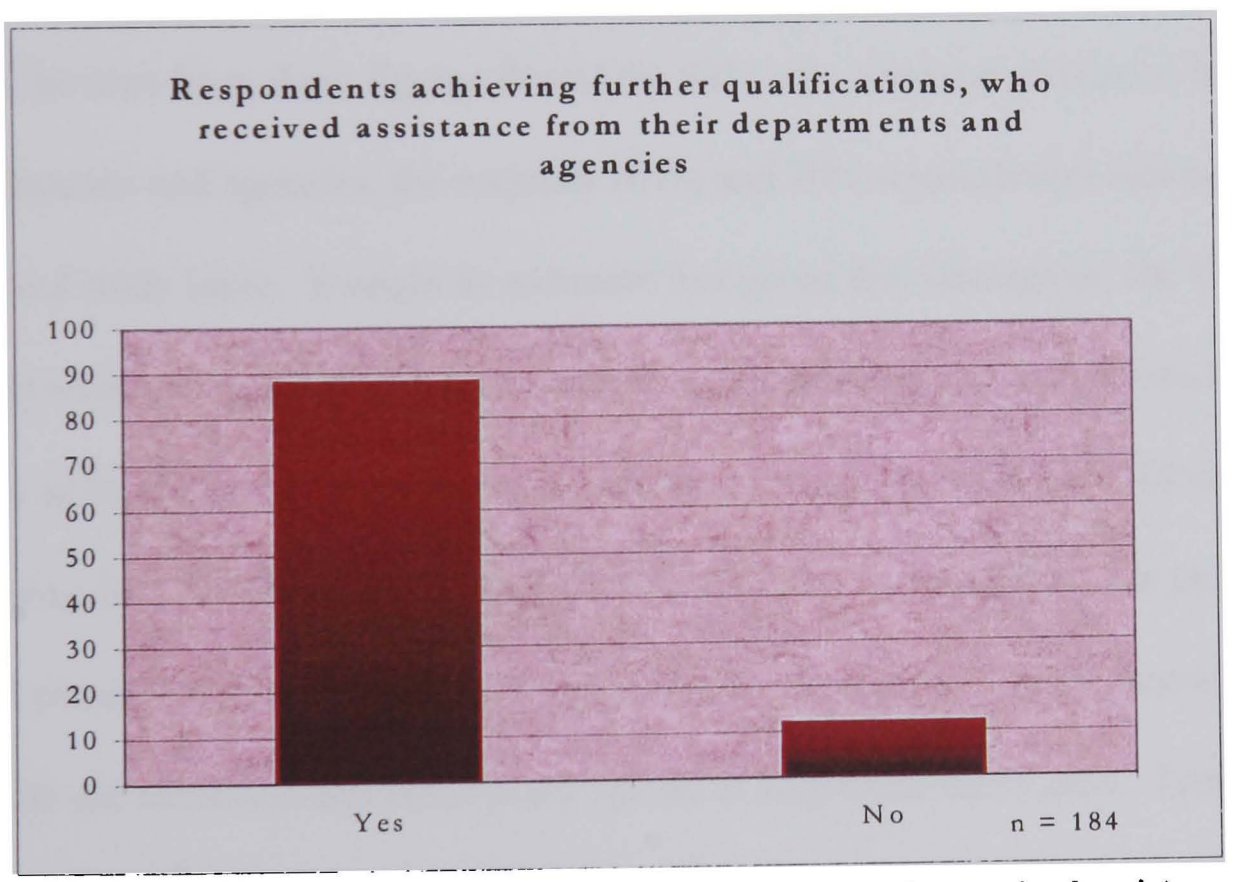


Fig 6.5 Respondents achieving further qualifications who received assistance from their departments and agencies

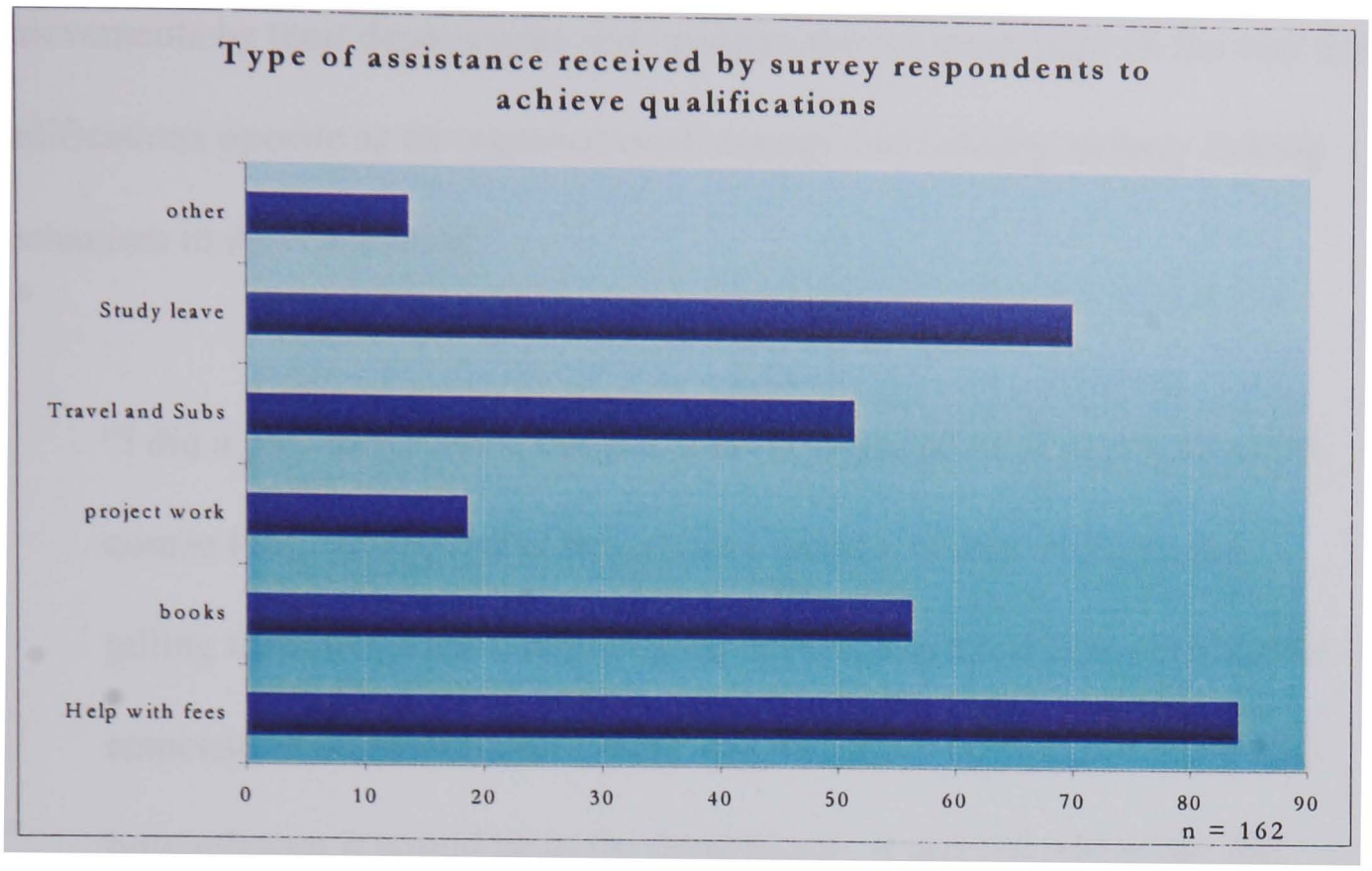


Fig 6.6 Type of assistance received by survey respondents to achieve qualifications

It can be seen from these figures that of the 88% who received assistance from their departments and agencies, the majority (84% and 70% respectively) received help with fees and study leave. It might be assumed that given this investment, the Civil Service would wish to extract maximum benefit from the additional qualifications obtained as this is in line with the intentions of the training strategy as outlined in *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996). It is also an integral step in producing HRD plans at unit level whereby group and individual gaps in skills, knowledge and attitude are identified and HRD plans agreed to help close these gaps. Tensions between individuals and line managers over what training and development is needed and why have to be resolved if HRD in business units is to respond to business needs while also having the commitment of individuals (Harrison, 1997, p.42).

The follow-up interviews that were conducted with some of the survey respondents revealed that a number had themselves taken additional qualifications since entering the

Civil Service. Their experiences of gaining their qualifications and the response to their achievements by their departments and agencies throws some light on the way that qualifications operate as an organisational strategy and training strategy linking mechanism in this case study:

> "I did a part-time Masters degree and the department funded 80% of the course fees. At the end of the course I wrote a minute to Personnel telling them that I had completed the course, and apart from an informal response of congratulations, there was no follow-up to that training and how relevant it would be to the department. It seemed odd given that they had invested four grand in having me trained"

> "I started an MBA when I was working in industry but then I was made redundant and I paid for the last year of the programme myself. When I joined the Civil Service I did some of the course work based on the department but there has been a resounding lack of interest in that. It is the 'not invented here' syndrome".

These comments are by no means exceptional particularly in their reference to higher degree qualifications. The Civil Service has its own Public Sector Master of Business Administration (MBA) Programme, announced in the *Continuity and Change* White Paper (HMSO, 1994, p.33). The programme is delivered by Imperial College School of Management and a consortium of Cranfield School of Management, Manchester Business School and the Civil Service College (Cabinet Office, 1997e).

Although the programme has recently been evaluated, the evaluation report has not yet been published externally but it would be surprising if the results differed significantly from the experiences reported by the survey respondents. The researcher has her own experiences to add, as her MBA was funded whilst she was employed by the Employment Service. The lack of recognition of her achievements in gaining the qualification led her to seek a career move to another executive agency, the Civil Service College.

Although more and more public servants are taking MBA courses, there is evidence that many of them are moving into the private sector when they graduate (Stephens, 1999). As Stephens says, "the public sector – and we as taxpayers – should be concerned about the exodus from public service of those who are presumably some of the best managers" and she adds, "this does not bode well for the government's stated intention of improving the way in which services are managed and delivered to the public"(p.31). As an organisational strategy and training strategy linking mechanism therefore the pursuit of higher professional management qualifications like the MBA in this case study requires a more systematic approach to career and personal development by both the individual and the organisation if the benefits are to be fully realised. At a national level, there is a growing recognition that the current separation of the study of the acquisition and supply of skills from issues concerned with the demand for, and use of, knowledge and skills in organisations needs to remedied, and that a more comprehensive approach is required (Mayhew and Keep, 1999, p.40). In organisations, "the links between enhanced skills and improved business performance are complex and conditional rather than simple and direct. Higher skills are only a means to an end" (Keep, 1999, p.35). These are issues which are of fundamental importance for the Civil

Service in its search for continuous performance improvement in its departments and agencies.

However, as figure 6.4 shows, the most popular further qualification obtained by survey respondents was a vocational qualification, which as we have seen in the last sub-section are themselves linked to Investors in People as the standards that can be used to review training and development needs. The new Management Charter Initiative (MCI) standards that underpin the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) in Management at Levels 3 and 4, and in Strategic Management and Operational Management at Level 5, were developed through consultation with thousands of managers throughout the private, public and voluntary sectors, and claim to define benchmarks of best management practice (MCI, 1998, p.1). The revised management standards were introduced following a review of 100 of the most used NVQs and SVQs undertaken in 1995 (Beaumont, 1995) which recommended changes to the form and structure of NVQ/SVQ standards, and best practice on assessment methods (p.5-6).

The largest public sector S/NVQ scheme in the United Kingdom was launched by the Benefits Agency in April 1993, offering over 3000 places to Agency staff (Benefits Agency, 1995, p.1). There were 423 candidates registered for a full award at Levels 4 and 5 in management in the Benefits Agency at the end of September, 1995 (p.22). The *Update on Key White Paper Statistics* (Cabinet Office, 1998f, p.3-4) states that of the 78% of departments and agencies who were able to provide the information required, the numbers of staff in their organisations holding recognised professional or vocational qualifications averaged at 28.3%. The update expressed disappointment that 22% of

organisations were unable to provide the information required and that many questioned the need to collect this data, "which suggests that the importance of having a qualifications strategy, the effectiveness of which can then be measured through monitoring, does not seem to be generally recognised" (p.4). This would seem to accord with the other findings on higher degree qualifications already mentioned. Another quote from the update is also relevant:

> "Additionally, it is surprising that some large departments expressed the view that the decision to fund qualifications and ensure a return on that investment is a local responsibility and that central tracking is not necessary. Given that qualifications represent a considerable investment and need a direct link to corporate needs, departments and agencies could be expected to want to assess overall investment and impact" (p.4).

Here again we see the difficulties of using professional management and training qualifications as a linking mechanism. We move now to the second strand of the raising levels of skills and awareness element of *Development and Training for Civil Servants*, namely the development of career anchors for specialists.

CAREER ANCHORS FOR 'SPECIALISTS'

The concept of career anchor was developed by Schein who describes it in summary (1978, p.127) as, "the pattern of self-perceived talents, motives, and values" which "serves to guide, constrain, stabilise, and integrate the person's career". He adds:

> "The career anchor functions in the person's work life as a way of organising experience, identifying one's area of contribution in the long run, generating criteria for kinds of work settings in which one wants to function, and identifying patterns of ambition and criteria for success by which one will measure oneself".

Schein (1978, p.128-160) identified five types of career anchor: technical/functional competence; managerial competence; security and stability; creativity; and autonomy and independence. Schein subsequently identified three other career anchor categories: service or dedication to a cause; pure challenge; and life style but his most recent research, whilst identifying that there has been a marked shift in what people identify their anchors to be, has not revealed any further anchor categories (Schein, 1996, p.2).

Accepting that the emphasis on generalist skills which have traditionally been a strength of the Civil Service can inhibit the growth of vital expertise in functional specialisms and policy areas, the White Paper (HMSO, 1996, p.25-26), in addition to specifying action to increase the number of staff with relevant professional and vocational qualifications and more flexible use of specialists, also states that there should be "a much greater emphasis on the development of 'career anchors' to complement generalist/managerial skills".

We have already seen in Chapter 2 how 42% of survey respondents considered that they were working in specialist jobs (figure 2.6). There is therefore an increasing number of civil servants who now regard themselves as specialists and work in areas that would not normally be classified as 'specialisms' in the traditional Civil Service use of the

word. We saw too in Chapter 3 how, at the same time as middle managers were reporting that there was more diversity in their work, the organisational strategy of the Civil Service also requires people with different specialist skills in order to deliver the objectives of their departments and agencies. A recognition in the White Paper (HMSO, 1996) that the development of career anchors for 'specialists' is important is another way of trying to link training strategy to organisational strategy in the Civil Service.

A number of the follow-up interviews were conducted with specialists, and their experiences throw light on this linking mechanism. The sort of 'specialisms' covered included managers working in personnel, printing, procurement, statistics, science, research, internal consultancy and cartography. In addition to the general questions, specialists were asked about their career anchors, and their perceptions of their career prospects, and their varied experiences of the opportunities that are open to them as specialists are revealing. Whilst some felt 'trapped' in their specialisms, others were more pragmatic about their particular situations:

> "I don't see my specialism as being a trap. I like it and I think that I am good at it. I have been in the Civil Service for 15 years now and all but three of those years in procurement, and it would be difficult for me to move out of that because I would be seen as a specialist and perhaps less attractive to people. I don't know what competencies I would need to move to procurement in another department because they are all so different now. When you had the annual report system it was all very similar but that has changed now"

"The overall pyramid for statisticians grades has broadened its base and there is an awful lot of grade 7s who are more than competent to do grade 5 or grade 6 posts but the jobs just don't exist, or we don't hear about the few that do come up. Therefore one is effectively stuck where one is. I think we should be given the opportunity to become experts on something or other because I think that would satisfy the desires of those of us who have been here for a while and would provide career prospects. Development is not just about promotion, it is about doing a good job"

"We have a big interchange with the policy branches so we have a lot of opportunities to go out to them. We have exchanges into other government departments too so I don't think that we feel trapped as specialists. I certainly don't feel trapped. Some of my colleagues who have had their wings clipped a bit have gone elsewhere, but they have usually got good enough contacts to go and find themselves nice little niches somewhere else in the department or in the Civil Service, and a lot have also found jobs outside as well as researchers in the academic world".

These varying attitudes are largely dependent upon the opportunities for development and the prospects for promotion in the interviewee's department or agency, both within and outside the specialism. As the White Paper (HMSO, 1996, p.25) acknowledges:

> "In the past, this (emphasis on generalist skills) has been exacerbated in the Civil Service by an emphasis on promotion as the main or only real incentive/reward for good performance – and by the standard test for promotion being the capacity to perform well in a variety of jobs in the higher grade. This has been a barrier to some specialists – many of whom have not been offered sufficient opportunities to widen their general managerial skill-base through training or widen job experience, or whose managerial skills have gone unrecognised because they have been labelled as specialists in a particularly restricted field".

Breaking down these barriers, however, remains difficult as witnessed by the following quote from one of the interviewees and his line manager:

> "I am trying to progress – that is a technical term in the new grading system, it is not the same as promotion – up to the next grade. I have been to the Civil Service College for some courses which were intended to try and broaden my experience but quite honestly when I came back to work I didn't really put that training into operation. Also, as specialists we do have a slight problem in that we do attract a large recruitment and retention allowance which means that to move sideways we would be on marked time until we retired at the same grade. You would only move sideways if there was an expectation that in a couple of years you would get promoted"

"It is difficult to keep specialist people motivated fully under those circumstances I think. I can't say to them that they are going to be easily able to get promotion or move to suitable lateral posts. I have not go much to motivate people with, reports at the end of the year, box markings, that sort of thing but they have got to be balanced as well. I certainly cannot hold out the promise that they will be able to find jobs even if I make them fitted for promotion because they have not got the broader experience. So I have said to quite a lot of people that whilst I do not want to lose them from here because I find major problems with staff recruitment and it takes a long time to train new people, after two or three years here they really ought to move sideways if they have got career aspirations to gain wider experience".

This lack of broader experience by specialists was highlighted by another interviewee who said,

> "Where we do fall down as specialist grade 7s is on areas that we just don't touch. We are very weak as individuals on areas like finance, contracts and people management skills because you don't manage anyone here until you get to be a grade 7".

Despite the recognition therefore in the White Paper (HMSO, 1996, p.27) that civil servants should be developing career anchors and that specialists should be used more flexibly with better opportunities for them to develop careers in generalist as well as specialist posts, the problems of using this emphasis on specialists as an organisational

strategy and training strategy linking mechanism remain. The difficulties are summarised by the senior line manager who was interviewed:

> "What staff will say, and I have sympathy with them, is that they don't know whether the department wants them to develop a range of skills so that they can work across the business or whether they should focus on the work areas and get experience and develop in an area. We haven't answered the question as to what is best for their career. I think people should have a broad range of Civil Service skills and then develop knowledge in particular areas".

Answering questions like these remains one of the challenges of linking organisational strategy and training strategy in this case study. From what the middle managers say about their own experiences, it would seem that training people in specialist areas of work is insufficient. Encouraging people to develop career anchors which on Schein's (1978, p.127) definition of the term, namely "the pattern of self-perceived talents, motives and values" which "serves to guide, constrain, stabilise, and integrate the person's career" requires a more integrated HRM strategy which will continue to develop, motivate and appropriately reward people working in specialisms. These are issues that the Civil Service will need to continue to address. One of the other challenges relates to providing awareness training and development opportunities for civil servants to maximise and use learning about the internal and external environments in which they operate, and the next sub-section looks at this issue as an organisational strategy and training strategy linking mechanism.

TOWARDS THE LEARNING AGE?

> "We are in a new age – the age of information and of global competition. Familiar certainties and old ways of doing things are disappearing. The types of jobs we do have changed as have the industries in which we work and the skills they need. At the same time, new opportunities are opening up as we see the potential of new technologies to change our lives for the better. We have no choice but to prepare for this new age in which the key to success will be the continuous education and development of the human mind and imagination"
>
> (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.9).

This quote from the Government's Green Paper *The Learning Age: a renaissance for a new Britain* (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.9) although published nearly two years after *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996) expresses many of the explicit and implicit messages contained in that White Paper. A survey on learning in the Civil Service acknowledged that the current policy on learning is laid out in the 1996 *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (Harris Research Centre, 1998, p.4). Since its publication, the *Modernising Government* White Paper (The Stationery Office, 1999) has made a commitment to the public service becoming a learning organisation (p.56), stating, "it needs to learn from its past successes and failures. It needs consistently to benchmark itself against the best, wherever that is found. Staff must be helped to learn new skills throughout their careers".

Development and Training for Civil Servants (HMSO, 1996) can therefore be seen as paving the way in the Civil Service for the learning initiatives that have followed. Recognising that "an increased awareness of the context in which they work is important for staff at all levels" (p.27) the White Paper sought to encourage:

- a better understanding among civil servants of the impact on users of the services they provide, and particularly on the private sector
- greater mobility between departments and agencies and other public bodies
- more awareness of technological developments
- increased understanding of international, social, economic, legal and constitutional environments
- and a proper appreciation of the core values of the Civil Service (p.27-31).

In this way the Civil Service aims to use individual learning as an organisational strategy and training strategy linking mechanism.

The idea of the Learning Company is a vision of what might be possible; it is not brought about, however, by simply training individuals but instead can only happen as a result of learning at the whole organisational level (Pedler, Burgoyne, and Boydell, 1997, p.3). Pedler, Burgoyne, and Boydell (1997) define the Learning Company as, "an organisation that facilitates the learning of all its members and consciously transforms itself and its context" (p.3). Whilst, this definition goes further than the training strategy outlined in *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996) which aims to increase awareness of the context in which civil servants operate rather than transforming it, the concept of the learning organisation itself is not without criticism

and is in urgent need of review (Sloman, 1999, p.31). Sloman argues for new business-driven models with learning seen as a continuous process and linked to reward systems, and organisations encouraging employees to participate in learning over and above what is required for narrow business requirements. The skill capabilities and application of knowledge workers should also be increased through interventions designed to encourage learning. There has certainly been confusion about the concept of the learning organisation which rather than being dropped, "should instead be treated, in the spirit of learning, as a resource with which to strengthen the idea and its application" (Burgoyne, 1999, p.44).

Whilst a full discussion of what is currently meant by the learning organisation is beyond the scope of this thesis, the conclusions from the *A reason for learning?* survey (Harris Research Centre, 1998, p.96-98) give some insights into the effectiveness of learning as an organisational strategy and training strategy linking mechanism in this case study. The survey concluded that although there is a high level of involvement in learning in the Public Services, with public servants well qualified when compared to the UK workforce as a whole, there remains a lack of understanding as to why learning is important and considerable cynicism surrounding initiatives such as IiP, and a 'learning divide' which excludes certain groups of public servants from learning. As a linking mechanism there therefore remains much work to be done.

The *Learning to Succeed* White Paper (Department for Education and Employment, 1999), which was published as a result of the consultation that followed the Green Paper, *The Learning Age* (Department for Education and Employment, 1998) spells out the Government's policy on lifelong learning and in so doing specifies a key role for

local authorities (Pollock, 1999). Local councils are expected to contribute to the proposed new national Learning and Skills Councils, to replace the Further Education Funding Council and the Training and Enterprise Councils, but on the basis of current evidence, Pollock (1999, p.58) asserts they have so far been sluggish in taking the lifelong learning initiative. While there are some signs of growing interest in lifelong learning, many councils are still not rising to the challenge and the learning local authority is still more vision than reality (Lucas, 1999, p.35).

Given this situation in the wider public service, the Government's commitment for the Civil Service to become a learning organisation and to be a promoter of lifelong learning for all its staff as articulated in the *Modernising Government* White Paper (The Stationery Office, 1999, p.56) at this stage looks ambitious. The Central Government National Training Organisation "Shadow" Secretariat have addressed this issue in an unpublished paper entitled *Creating the Learning Organisation* (1999) suggesting that, as a first step, departments and agencies produce action plans for embedding lifelong learning principals and creating a learning organisation. Further research into the future effectiveness of learning as a means of linking organisational strategy and training strategy as an integral part of the culture change programme spelt out in the *Modernising Government* agenda (The Stationery Office, 1999) would be worthwhile. For now, we turn our attention to the third and final key element in *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996, p.37-47), namely managing development and careers.

MANAGING DEVELOPMENT AND CAREERS

TRADITIONAL AND TRANSFORMED CAREERS

Development and Training for Civil Servants (HMSO, 1996, p.37) makes clear that "the need for greater efficiency and effectiveness in the Civil Service is placing greater and more clearly defined responsibilities on individual members of staff". It goes on to state that training and development in departments and agencies whilst focused on organisational needs, should meet too the needs of individuals, and these individuals, "must, in turn, accept a matching obligation to commit themselves to a programme of continuous development, and must be key players in drawing up their own career and development plans" (p.37). The stated aim of helping individuals take charge of their own careers is a significant trend in the pattern of career development activities in organisations (Hirsh and Jackson, 1996, p.19).

Hirsh and Jackson (1996) have identified common tensions and issues facing major employing organisations in the UK resulting in pressures on the idea of the corporate career. These pressures include:

- cost savings resulting in workforce reductions, and also market testing and contracting out in the public sector
- de-layering, downsizing and decreased promotion opportunities
- more mistrust and less job security
- increased short-term performance cultures
- frequent changes in organisational structures resulting in less clear career paths in decentralised organisations

- and a breakdown of the old processes by which careers are managed, with HR and career development responsibilities devolved to line managers (p.1 and p.19-21).

They see therefore new types of career and development processes emerging in the late 1980s and early 1990s, driven by the individual rather than by the organisation, with a focus on new activities such as career workshops, personal development plans, learning centres and self-help books and materials replacing promotion boards, assessment centres, appointment processes and succession planning (p.9-10). The image of the inverted doughnut organisation, with its core of necessary jobs and people surrounded by an open space filled by flexible workers and flexible supply contracts, can be seen in the market testing of traditional core activities undertaken by the Civil Service, although concerns remain about the effect on morale if too many key elements of work are out-sourced (Handy, 1994, p.74-75). Flatter organisational structures "explode any illusions about career prospects which many employees are able to maintain in a more hierarchical structure" with many employees hitting a career plateau at an earlier age than they might have anticipated, and individuals staying in jobs for longer (Holbeche, 1995, p.7).

Despite interesting career developments in organisations though the traditional career continues to survive, and is some way removed from the rhetoric of the new organisation and the end of the career (Guest and Mackenzie Davey, 1996, p.25). Guest and Mackenzie (1996, p.23) distinguish between the traditional career characterised in organisations by the existence of bureaucracy, hierarchy, and security, and transformed careers in flexible, flat, learning organisations based on project work, with a transitional stage of organisational change in which there is downsizing, restructuring, insecurity,

chaos and uncertainty, and network-orientated careers. In the transformed organisations they describe, challenge, autonomy, impressive extrinsic rewards and the opportunity to learn, develop and become more marketable will have to be provided in order to attract and retain high-quality people, and career management systems will focus on self-development, mentoring, information systems, networking and flexible job structures. Handy's (1994, p.71-73) idea of building a portfolio of different sorts of work will help people design their own careers. The result of the porfolio working ethos is that succession planning is being abandoned by many of the UK's top companies who find that there are few managers who stay in an organisation long enough to be groomed for the top jobs (People Management, 1997, p.15).

As an element of the traditional career management system along with recruitment and selection, management and development, appraisal and counselling, and manpower flows, succession planning is one of the central problems facing organisations (Guest and Mackenzie Davey, 1996, p.24). The traditional challenges of career management therefore still remain (Guest, 1995, p.51), often alongside the newer ones discussed above.

Accepting that the picture of career management is changing in departments and agencies, the White Paper (HMSO, 1996, p.37-38) aims to give civil servants more confidence in developing and managing their careers so that they can better realise their potential in a more flexible, delayered Civil Service and in so doing link training strategy to the organisational strategy.

The survey questionnaire (see Appendix IV) asked middle managers at question 32 who they feel is responsible for managing their careers. Their responses are given at figure 6.7.

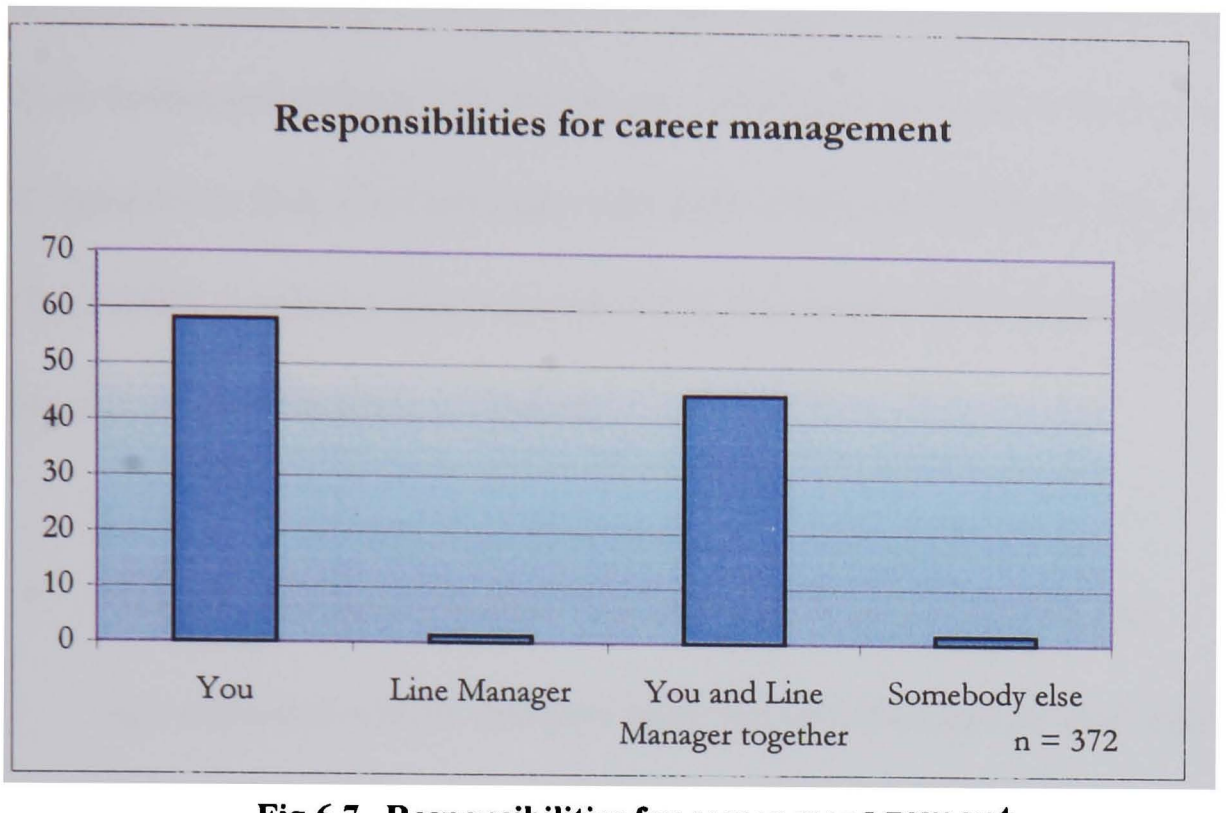


Fig 6.7 Responsibilities for career management

It can be seen from this figure that the majority of respondents felt that they were responsible for managing their career, closely followed by those who felt it was a shared responsibility between themselves and their line managers. Some respondents ticked more than one response to this question. At first sight it would appear therefore that despite only 41% of respondents being aware of *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996) as stated in figure 5.1 in Chapter 5, the organisational messages about career management responsibilities have filtered down the departmental and agency hierarchies.

In fact, as we shall see when we look at development partnerships later in this section, the Government's recognition that "staff cannot successfully take forward their development without real support" and that, "what is required is an effective

partnership between the organisation and each staff member, involving top management, the line manager and the individual working within a co-operative framework, each with a clear role" (HMSO, 1996, p.38) has not been understood by respondents. This may be indicative of their expectations about the level of support that will be forthcoming from line managers. Although there are processes in departments and agencies to help civil servants with their career management, the predominant view of the middle managers interviewed is that it is largely their responsibility and a quote from one of the managers is typical:

> "The Developing Careers Together (DCT) is the training and development review that you carry forward throughout your time in the Health and Safety Executive. It is in two bits: you look at the skills you need to do your current job; and you are also supposed to identify what you want to do next, and the skills that will help you get to that post. It is though a two way thing. I think that there is much more responsibility on the individuals to identify what they want to do. You have got to be looking ahead, you have got to look for the opportunities. We're not career managed anymore, there is no longer any concept of that".

Although there is no central management of careers in departments and agencies (HMSO, 1996, p.37), elements of the traditional career do still exist. Whilst general promotion boards are rare, with mainly job specific selection on the basis of competencies, as has been stated earlier in this chapter, the Investors in People standard has strengthened appraisal and review systems. In the previous chapter on training strategy we saw an increasing use of personal development plans but still only limited

access to non-traditional training and development methods such as mentoring, resource centres and secondments (see tables 5.4, 5.5, and 5.6). Current career management is therefore based on a combination of the traditional and the transformed stages of organisational change (Guest and Mackenzie Davey, 1996, p.23) with a move towards self development but still some way to go if the pendulum of ownership of career development described by Hirsh and Jackson (1996, p.9-10) is to swing to a position that emphasises the prime responsibility of the individual in driving career and development processes.

Some middle managers found the concept of self development and taking responsibility for their careers difficult and demotivating as the idea runs contrary to the "psychological contract" they have with their own department or agency. We move now to look at what is meant by the "psychological contract" and the nature of the new contract that appears in some instances to be operating in this case study.

THE NEW PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT

Motivating people towards a high level of performance is a complex problem for organisations and can better be conceptualised in terms of a "psychological contract" which is entered into by both the individual and the organisation (Schein, 1970, p.12).

> "The notion of the psychological contract implies that the individual has a variety of expectations of the organisation and that the organisation has a variety of expectations of him. These expectations not only cover how much work is to be performed for how much pay, but also involve the

whole pattern of rights, privileges, and obligations between worker and organisation" (Schein, 1970, p.12).

The working out of the psychological contract is an ongoing process of negotiation and renegotiation between the individual and the organisation although much of the process remains implicit rather than being written down, and the contract will change at various stages of an individual's career (Schein, 1978, p.120-122). Within the implicit contact are embedded three kinds of individual expectations and needs: the need for equity and justice; the desire for security and relative certainty; and the need for fulfilment, satisfaction, and progression, (Mant, 1995, p.48). The four stages of psychological contracting between the organisation and the individual involve:

- exchanging information about the organisation's and the individual's wants and offers
- negotiating the organisation's and the individual's offers
- monitoring the deal, establishing whether the organisation's or the individual's wants have changed, the contract is fair and if it has been kept from both sides
- and the final stage of renegotiation or exiting from the contract which is dependent on the outcome of the monitoring process (Herriot, 1995, p.198-204).

"The psychological contract is of fundamental importance to business organisations at this juncture" because:

> "After a decade of cost cutting in response to ever increasing competition, many are realising that cost competitiveness is not enough

> to ensure survival in a global market place....Innovation which results in new or better products or services quicker to market is also required"
>
> (Herriot and Pemberton, 1997, p.47).

Herriot and Pemberton conclude that the measures taken to reduce costs and enhance productivity in organisations have resulted in the loss of the conditions necessary for innovation, and a change in the nature of the employment relationship is necessary if innovation is to be achieved whilst retaining the benefits of cost competitiveness (p.48).

In recognition of the importance of the psychological contract to the efficiency and effectiveness of the Civil Service, some departments and agencies have made attempts to address this issue by renegotiating their psychological contract with their employees. One of the middle managers who was interviewed spoke of his own experience of career development in his department:

> "I find development quite difficult to grapple with in some ways. I think people have not been too sure about the ground rules for progressing in the department over the last few years which is something that senior managers are starting to address. They are putting together what's called 'The New Understanding', like a contract spelling out, "we will provide you with this and we expect that of you". It is being led by the Permanent Secretary, and it is going to give people a better idea, some sort of clue how they can progress. It reinforced the idea that people have got to take responsibility for their own development. I see myself as responsible for my own career".

Not everybody who was interviewed though was so pragmatic about developments in their departments and agencies. One interviewee spoke about the career information that was issued as being, "so patronising" in its attempt to give guidance about career progression without promotion. Manager's attitudes were largely determined not just by the organisational messages concerning development and careers but by the support that was given for people to engage in developmental activities. The reality therefore was much more important to individuals than the rhetoric. Although employees welcome more up-front statements about career development, they will judge the organisation by what it delivers, not by what it says (Hirsh and Jackson, 1996, p.33). Where people were allowed to participate in training and development other than that directly related to helping them achieve high performance in their current job and meet devolved organisational objectives, managers were much more positive about the prospect of taking responsibility for their own development and careers.

In making statements about career development, it is important that the links between business needs and the message must ring true; employees will be more disappointed if they are told they are working for a 'learning organisation' which wants to help them 'manage their own career' but the only training provided is related to their current job. For them this will feel like, "getting a first class railway ticket and finding yourself in a third class compartment" (Hirsh and Jackson, 1996, p.43). We see here in particular the potential incompatibility of the organisational strategy and training strategy linking mechanisms as used in *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996) with Investors in People which is driving managers to use training and development to help achieve immediate departmental and agency objectives, and individuals seeking

wider self development as part of their personal career management activities. We will return to this very important point when we look more at hypothesis testing in the last section of this chapter.

The willingness to take responsibility for their development and careers was particularly noticeable in interviewees who had the opportunity to attend developmental events where these issues had been addressed, and they were seen to be very much more proactive in their own career management. Others though remained more sceptical and there was clearly an imbalance in the psychological contract with their department or agency. Increased demand for training and development has much less to do with enlightened employers and more to do with employee-driven demand (Martin, Staines, and Pate, 1998). Martin, Staines, and Pate (1998, p.20-21) argue that:

> "Changing demand conditions, redundancies, different types of jobs, prospects of alternative employment and types of work undertaken by employees have influenced employee perceptions and feelings of powerlessness to shape their expectations of training and development, causing them to feel let down by what was delivered".

Certainly, many civil servants expressed dissatisfaction with the training and career development that was delivered in their own departments and agencies.
This sense of dissatisfaction was demonstrated by the respondents to the survey questionnaire (see Appendix IV) which asked them at question 33 what they though their next career move should be (excluding promotion). Their responses are shown at

figure 6.8 which was prepared on the basis of the qualitative data that was supplied by respondents.

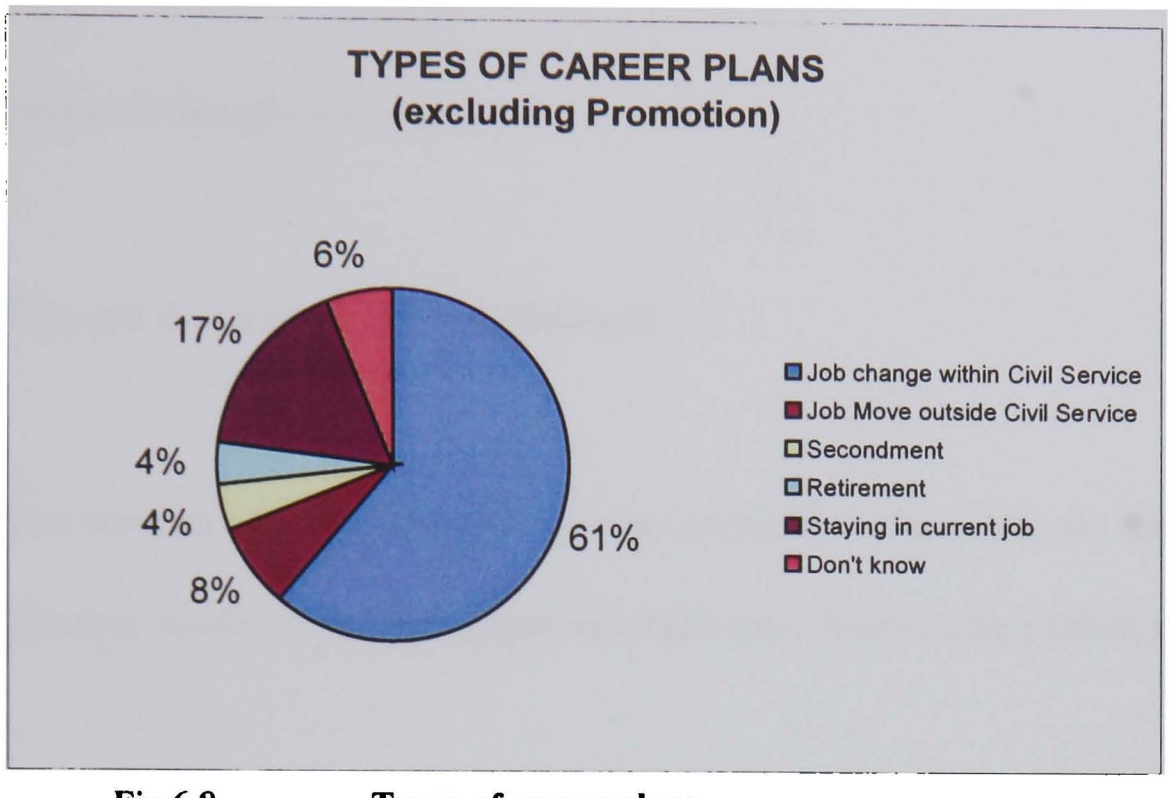


Fig 6.8 Types of career plans

As might be expected, 61% of respondents indicated that their next career move would be a change of job within the Civil Service but a further 12% were looking to leave the Civil Service either on a job move or on retirement. A surprising 17% were planning to stay in their current work because they had not long been in post or they could see no prospects of a suitable move to another job. There are implications for delayered organisations as employees stay in the same roles for longer with the danger of stagnation and bottlenecks in key areas where 'information is power' (Holbeche, 1995, p.7). Some of the quotes from the survey respondents in answering question 33 are also illuminating:

"I only wish to move on promotion"

"Continue in contract management until retirement"

"Early retirement leading to external job opportunities"

"I haven't thought about it"

"Stay put or voluntary early retirement"

"Too soon in this job (1 month) to even consider it. No plans, no sense of direction, made worse by merger and staff cuts. Sorry to be cynical but..."

"Out of the Civil Service and back to industry, commerce"

"No more moves needed, wanted. I have had a lot of moves earlier on and no longer need any fresh ones".

Whilst many of the comments are related to the stage of the respondent's career and many others who have not been quoted were looking to change jobs to gain wider experience, there was a feeling of disappointment with their career prospects from many respondents. As one, so concisely described it:

"I regret no 'career' in prospect".

Given that relationships between organisations and individuals have weakened, often resulting in distrust and cynicism towards the organisation, organisations need to develop a new kind of commitment:

> "Through the creation of meanings and values created by individuals and groups through their work, their relationships with other people, and their opportunities for growth, rather than impersonal values and mission statements handed down from the top"
>
> (Hiltrop, 1996, p.42).

Where departments and agencies had apparently succeeded in doing this, a new psychological contract appeared to be operating, where they had not, dissatisfaction among survey respondents remained. The Civil Service would be wise to heed Hiltrop's (1996) message about commitment in the culture change it is seeking as part of the *Modernising Government* agenda (The Stationery Office, 1999). Faced with a new psychological contract in the 1990s there are three common reactions that can be expected from employees, namely to "get safe, get out, or get even" where the last reaction means employees evening out the deal and reducing their contribution (Herriot, 1995, p.191-192).

We will leave a further discussion of the culture change that the present Labour Government is seeking until the next and final chapter of this thesis but for now we do need to remind ourselves that *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996) sees responsiblities for managing development and careers as being an effective partnership between the individual, the line manager and top management, and it

accepts that, "an unsupported approach would not be of benefit to their department or agency" (p.38). We will look now at how these development partnerships are working in practice in this case study.

DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIPS

The 'anti-career' drivers associated with the demise of the traditional career in organisations have, as we have seen, tended to lead to an underlying shift in the ownership of career development from the organisation to the individual. More recently, however, there are some pressures or 'pro-development' drivers associated with the need for continuous improvement through continuous learning which are starting to nudge organisations back from the more radical individual position of career ownership (Hirsh and Jackson, 1996, p.23). This more accommodating position where the organisation accepts some responsibility for development on a partnership basis is the one that is articulated in *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996, p.38). There are three parties to this partnership approach; top management, the line manager and the individual, and for ease of discussion the roles of each in this case study will be numbered (i), (ii) and (iii) in the paragraphs that follow.

(i) Top management

The White Paper (HMSO, 1996, p.38) sees that within the partnership arrangement, top managers in each department and agency are responsible for "ensuring that there is a skilled, flexible and experienced workforce to deliver both the short and the longer term goals of the organisation effectively", and "through their leadership, providing the vision and the motivation to both management and staff to develop and work together to make the goals a reality". Within these responsibilities the role of top management is

to provide a training and development strategy for the organisation, a system for clear two-way communications, and direction, support and resources to line managers so that they can carry out their responsibilities.

In the previous chapter on Civil Service training strategy, we saw at figure 5.3 that whilst 68% of survey respondents stated that their department or agency had a training strategy, only 67% of that number indicated in figure 5.4 that the contents of the strategy had been communicated to them. Respondents' perceptions of the aim of the training strategy were shown in table 5.1 of that chapter with only 7% perceiving that career development was an aim in their department or agency. There is therefore a serious question about the way in which top management are fulfilling their roles and responsibilities in the development partnership. Communications reflect and shape the culture of an organisation and are an essential element in establishing a climate for change (Holbeche, 1995, p.33).

In its search to implement the vision where individual employees take responsibility for their own careers and development with active support from their organisations, the Cabinet Office commissioned the Institute for Employment Studies to lead a consortium project to develop practical ways in which departments and agencies could support individuals (The Institute for Employment Studies, 1997a, p.4). All six consortium organisations found that the vision of *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996) was far removed from the experience of many employees (Hirsh and Wood, 1998, p.56). The project produced an eight-stage framework for addressing career and skill development issues in departments and agencies with the first stage involving the consideration of the real business challenges facing

organisations and their career development implications, and how issues are connected and how they can be integrated. Subsequent stages involve project planning, establishing the key issues, preparing an agenda for action, designing HR processes, piloting, implementation and support, and evaluation and evolution (The Institute for Employment Studies, 1997a, p.7). The framework suggests 'how' to work on the issues, rather than 'what' the answers should be (The Institute for Employment Studies, 1997b, p.8).

Whilst the projects showed the need for diverse solutions to meet diverse circumstances, they also revealed some common problems for senior managers and HR managers concerning the tensions between the purpose and nature of career and skill development which needs to address longer term as well as short-term business needs, and effective action resting on understanding what a career really means for different groups of staff (The Institute for Employment Studies, 1997a, p.8). The consortium concluded that development needs to be broadly defined to include formal training and education and also mentoring, coaching, distance learning, secondments and work shadowing (p.8). We have already seen in the last chapter how traditional training methods continue to prevail in departments and agencies (see tables 5.5 and 5.6) and the consortium accepted that, "employee development initiatives are often not sustained, sometimes not even fully implemented, and notoriously vulnerable to budget cuts" (p.9). The project highlighted the importance of reaching a shared view among the senior management team on the areas that require action and the need for honesty in the messages that go out about careers development and how they are changing (Hirsh and Wood, 1998, p.56-57).

Despite the project, however, the criticisms that were expressed by many of the follow-up interviewees about the way that their career issues are supported in their departments and agencies would suggest that again the practice of a systematic approach is some way removed from the theory. Top management commitment to learning and development is therefore often lacking in departments and agencies. The modern organisational myth that all employees are our greatest asset is "a fiction that has spawned countless untruths and frustrated and demotivated employees in company after company" (Clarke, 1998, p.47). Clarke argues instead for a differentiated approach towards when and how it might be important to value people for organisational effectiveness with a more honest, socially responsible dialogue about the employment relationship. Whilst this view runs contrary to the training strategy and linking mechanisms selected in *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996) the reality of top management support for career development in departments and agencies is some way removed from the rhetoric.

(ii) Line Managers

We have looked in depth at the role of line managers in the previous chapter. The White Paper (HMSO, 1996, p.41) accepts that their role within the partnership "is demanding and is pivotal to its success". Despite this acceptance, however, and the stated intention that line managers should have direction and support from top management, and the training and development necessary to develop their management and leadership skills to take on their "considerable staff management responsibility" (p.42), staff management was the third largest outstanding training and development need volunteered by survey respondents (see table 5.2).

The expertise required to successfully carry out this role continues to be underestimated in departments and agencies. The responsibilities of line managers to give their staff the opportunities and motivation to develop the skills they need to fulfil business objectives and improve performance (p.42) are, as we saw in the last chapter, not inconsiderable. Complementing this responsibility with also providing opportunities for staff, wherever possible, to develop greater expertise and wider skills in line with the longer term needs of the organisation (p.42) creates a load on line managers that they may be incapable of discharging. With awareness of change in business objectives diminishing as we move down the organisational hierarchy (see figure 3.3 in Chapter 3) there remains the serious question of how line managers at middle management grades can effectively communicate even short-term objectives to their staff, when they are not fully aware of these objectives themselves. In these situations helping staff develop to meet the longer-term business objectives becomes almost impossible.

The White Paper, however, sees communication as a key development role of line managers who should also give honest, open and constructive feedback to staff and help them draw up development plans, and make the best use of training and development opportunities, whilst ensuring equality of opportunity and providing for effective leadership and team working. With 15% of middle managers reporting that changing business objectives had increased the volume of their work (see table 3.1) and some interviewees talking about increases of around 20%, it is unsurprising as we saw in the last chapter that discharging these sorts of development responsibilities becomes lower priority than meeting measurable organisational targets.

Some middle managers were critical about the lack of support that was forthcoming from personnel sections to help with staff development issues:

> "Having worked in Personnel I know that they are not as skilled as they might be at being able to identify what development is needed. I don't mean to say that I would expect someone to have a magic wand but when I first worked in Personnel even if things weren't perfect there was much more of a nurturing approach that personnel officers took and they could, in discussion with the line manager, think about the way a person's career had already taken off, and what it might be a good idea to think about for the future. Over the last five or six years the tendency has been to move away from that and give the individuals and the line managers the responsibility which is perfectly understandable. But I think in a sense it has possibly gone too far because you don't any longer feel that there is anybody in Personnel you can phone up and say, "do you think I could have a discussion about my career prospects or what I need to do to develop a bit further", to get some guidance from someone who has an independent perspective"

> "We have delegated day-to-day personnel management responsibilities to line managers and one of the things delegated has been career development. Line managers have the primary responsibility for the career development of their staff. Under the appraisal system, and it is supported by IiP, you have mid-term reviews with your manager to review your objectives, see if you have achieved any, and whether they

need adjustment, new ones and so on, and development requirements are discussed then. They are also discussed at your main appraisal each year with your forward development plan. And separate from that individuals are at liberty to ask to have an interview with their personnel officer although Personnel don't have a primary responsibility for career development since delegation. Many staff find that difficult. They believe that Personnel should maintain the career development responsibility because they feel that they are independent of their line management chain, and also that they are likely to have the knowledge as to what might be available elsewhere".

From what the line managers say therefore it would appear that the support they require in order to undertake their challenging staff development role is not always forthcoming in departments and agencies.

(iii) The Individual

The responsibility placed on individual civil servants by the White Paper is to seek to improve their performance through continuous learning and development (HMSO, 1996, p.43). It also requires each individual to build up a curriculum vitae (CV) and to compile evidence of a range of skills and achievements relating to core competencies to demonstrate flexibility and managerial potential or ability, and contribute to mutual development of civil servants by acting as informal and formal mentors. In return for this self motivational development *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996, p.45-47) lays out what the individual can expect from the organisation, namely a culture of learning and equality of opportunity, job specific training and wider

development to perform current jobs, information and advice to inform decisions about future development, support in preparing and updating development plans to help them take advantage of career opportunities, and recognition of learning achievement. We have already looked at some of these issues in this chapter and the previous one. We saw in the previous section how many middle managers believe that their learning achievement has not been recognised, and in the last chapter how nearly one third of survey respondents did not feel that they had been adequately trained and developed to deal with changes to their current jobs (see figure 5.5), and only 8% volunteered that they are using personal development plans to plan their training and development (see table 5.4).

Question 33 on the survey questionnaire (see Appendix IV) asked respondents what they thought their next career move should be (excluding promotion) and figure 6.8 in the sub-section on the new psychological contract shows the analysis from the qualitative data. Question 34 on the questionnaire asked respondents how realisable they felt their career plans are, and question 35 asks how they intend to achieve their career moves. The responses to these two questions are given at figure 6.9 and table 6.2.

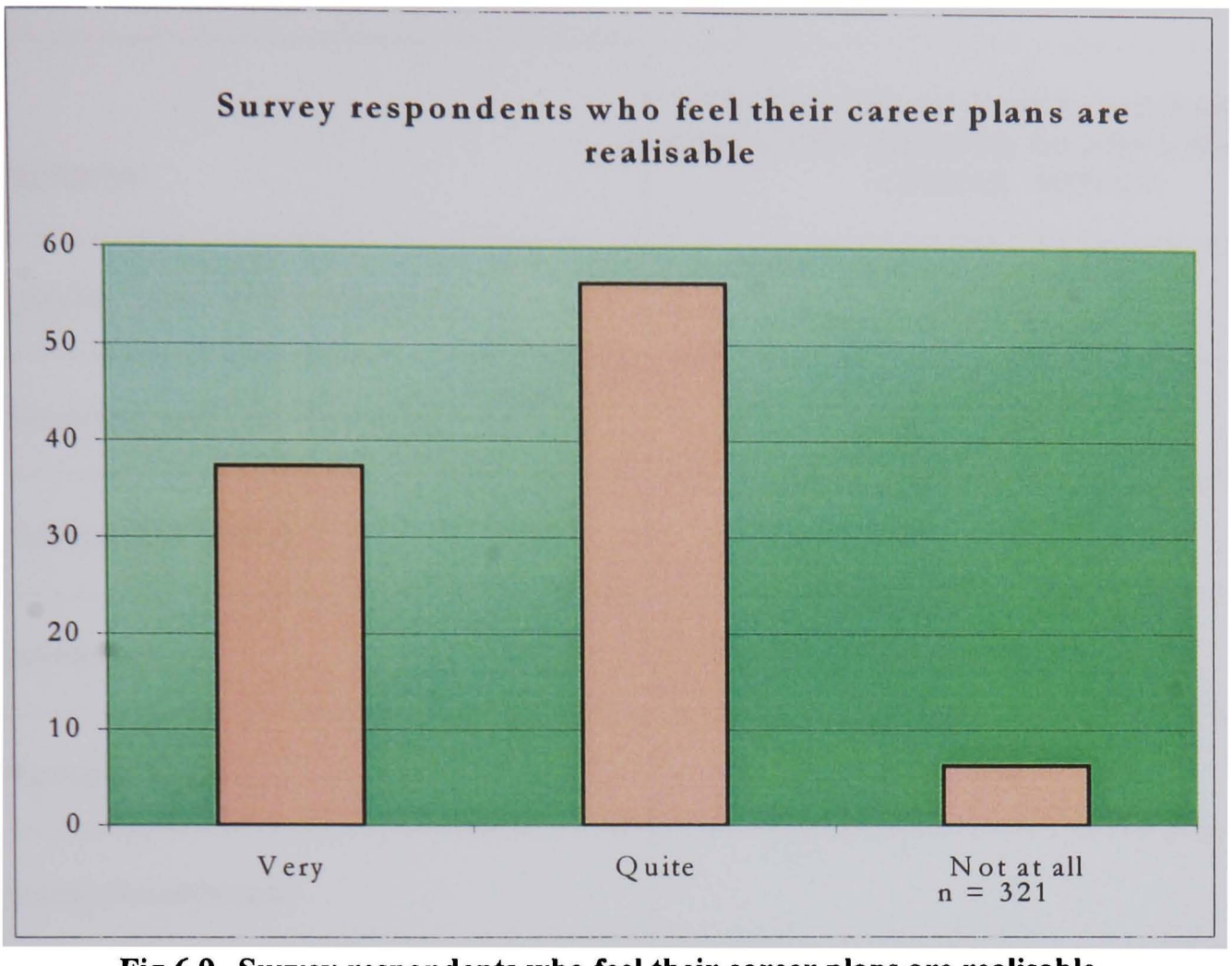


Fig 6.9 Survey respondents who feel their career plans are realisable

METHODS OF CAREER MANAGEMENT

METHOD	PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS USING THIS METHOD TO ADVANCE THEIR CAREER MOVES
Applying for advertised vacancies	39
Discussions with Line Managers	12
Education and training	11
Networking	9
Personnel Sections	5
Projects/ Secondments	4
Use of Grade Manager	3
Updating CV	2
Recruitment Agencies/Consultants	1
Management Development Schemes	1
Assessment Centre	1

n = 304

Table 6.2 Methods of career management

It can be seen from figure 6.9 that whilst all but 6% of respondents feel that their career plans are either very or quite realisable, the methods of career management employed by the respondents rely heavily on applying for advertised vacancies. Only 2% of respondents volunteered that they would be updating their CV's. Of course, with job specific selection, the application form for jobs is geared very much to the applicant

demonstrating competence for the job being sought, and evidence of skills and achievements will help with the application process. However, given the importance attached to CV's in the White Paper (HMSO, 1996, p.45) it is disappointing that this method was not mentioned by more respondents. We shall return to the methods of career management when we move now to explore the area of career development processes in departments and agencies in the next sub-section.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES

Five key functions are required for effective career development:

- the assessment of skills, knowledge and attitudes
- the supply of information on job options and what skills are required
- a career and development plan
- access to skill development
- and access to other jobs or work experiences.

These same functions apply to employees whose careers are being centrally managed by the organisation and to those employees who are responsible for their own career development (Hirsh and Jackson, 1996, p.16-17). The sort of processes that may be used to support the thinking functions, namely those concerned with assessment, options and action planning, include self-help packages, appraisal, development centres, competencies, career counselling and mentoring, whilst those concerned with action in skill development and job access include personal development plans, education and training, networking, secondments, succession, lateral moves and vacancy systems (p.16-17).

Vertical advancement up the flattened organisational hierarchy is not the only option for career development; lateral movement can also be a promising avenue for career mobility to broaden an employee's base of knowledge and skills and help develop new competencies, and the stigma attached to downshifting jobs is diminishing as people confront the necessity to change the focus of their careers over time (Kaye and Farren, 1996, p.50). However, initiatives in the field of career and skill development in departments and agencies can appear disjointed or even conflicting and at odds with other aspects of HR, with pay systems which discourage lateral movement by putting performance pay at risk in new or unfamiliar job roles (The Institute for Employment Studies, 1997b, p.8).

This was an issue that was recognised by many of the middle managers who were interviewed and they also spoke about the difficulties of being accepted for lateral moves based on competency application procedures where applicants were expected to be immediately fully effective rather than to move into developmental roles. One of the comments from the senior line manager interviewed is worth making as an illustration here:

> "We have got to find a way of providing incentives for people to move out of jobs. Another approach would be challenging them in a different way. The kind of things we are thinking about here is internal interchange where after a certain period when someone has got pretty comfortable in their role that we encourage them very actively to do some, say, shadowing somewhere else, or that we send them to work for a limited period in another area. It opens up their minds to other

experiences but it also gives them experience in an area where they can actually put on their CV that they did this so they might feel that they have a stronger claim to go for interviews in other areas. We have been trying for a long time to go more on aptitude than experience for lateral job moves but in this harsh climate everyone wants their preferred candidate to hit the ground running".

Actually helping people with the thinking process that helps them decide what skills they need to develop for job moves is another challenge for departments and agencies and some of the middle managers interviewed also spoke about their experiences in going through this process:

"With our staff appraisal booklet there is something that sets out broadly the skills profile supporting bands A, B and C so people can see the skills that they need to acquire if they don't have them already. The thing about the technical work is that although there are a lot of skills you could acquire doing this job, when it comes to jobs in the wider department, the feedback that people get is that these skills alone are insufficient. They need experience of other areas of work. There are very few jobs that require the type of technical experience you get here so it does make it difficult to move even laterally because there aren't many posts for people to go to"

"One of the things we have tried to do in the department, without great success but at least the aspiration was there, we have produced what

they have called 'work area profiles'. What that is, it is like a map of the department, what this division, directorate or unit do, the nature of their work, and the kind of skills and competencies that are required in that unit to deliver its key objectives. And that enables you to do two things; it enables the individual to say, "I have got those skills and I would quite like to go and work there and I can map out my career", and the other thing it enables you to do is it helps you identify the skills required for job moves. It is widely available to everybody through the notice board on the computer system".

Many other interviewees also mentioned competency frameworks as helping them decide what skills they need to develop for career progression which can be facilitated by lateral as well as vertical job moves. A universal competence model which addresses the career self-management competencies that are required by people facing work and career choices and transitions is required if individuals are to take greater ownership of their career development (Ball, 1997). Ball (1997, p.76) has identified four overlapping career competencies:

- optimising your situation which includes, "the ability to take a goal-directed approach to career planning , to anticipate future business and life changes and to promote one's own career interests"
- using your career planning skills "to keep our career and personal development under constant review"
- engaging in personal development
- and balancing work and non-work demands.

Everyone should regularly evaluate their job to identify if career goals are synchronised with the market-place and with long-range individual plans (Schein, 1995, p.x). Accepting that jobs are becoming less well-defined, Schein (1995) has developed a methodology and self-help book to enable individuals to go through the strategic job and role planning process. Many departments and agencies too have issued guidance to staff on planning their careers, supported in some cases by career development workshops. The purpose of one guidance pack is described as being to:

> "Outline the Department's approach to career development; explain the new policies and procedures and how they can be used to help you develop your career and your experience; explain the respective roles of the individual, the line manager and the Staff Directorates in this process; and signpost you to sources of more detailed information, should you need it"
>
> (Department of Trade and Industry, 1998, p.1).

Despite the availability of published material in departments and agencies like the guidance pack described, the most popular method of advancing the career moves of survey respondents remains applying for advertised vacancies as we saw in table 6.2 with 39% of respondents using this method. This was followed by 12% of managers who would use discussions with their own line managers, 11% who are looking to engage in further education or training and 9% who are using networking. A small 1% were planning to attend an assessment centre, use a management development scheme or go to a recruitment agency, and only 2% planned to update their CV. Very few (5%)

mentioned contacting personnel sections and even less (3%) using a grade manager, as might be expected giving the delegation of personnel responsibilities to line managers. 4% were looking to get involved in projects and secondments to progress their career. Many of the processes for effective career development described by Hirsh and Jackson (1996, p.16) such as career counselling and workshops, mentoring, and self-help packages were not even mentioned by survey respondents.

Despite all the messages therefore about managing development and careers contained in the White Paper (HMSO, 1996) the old system of career management through lateral (and sometimes) vertical job moves appears to remain. This more traditional career system carries it with it a feeling of hopelessness from those who believe they have no opportunity to climb further up the organisational hierarchy and has been made more acute by the development of the senior Civil Service. In the words of one middle manager who was interviewed:

> "I think that the divide between those in the Senior Civil Service and those who are not is massive now. That for anybody like me who is a mainstream grade 7 who came in as an EO, even with reasonably good prospects, I would say that there is absolutely no change of people like me reaching promotion to the Senior Civil Service. Now it was never that good but I think the answer is that it doesn't exist now".

Given this viewpoint, the question must be asked about the effectiveness of self-development and career management as a training strategy linking mechanism, to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness as an integral part of the organisational

strategy, if access to the upper echelons of the Civil Service are to be denied to a large percentage of the very people who have practical experience of delivering services on the ground.

EVALUATING THE LINKING MECHANISMS

Towards the beginning of this chapter, it was explained that all departments and agencies are required to produce annual reports on the implementation of *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996), and that to date three such reports have been published. The 1996 White Paper has been put to the test against the views of middle managers concerning the ways in which the linking mechanisms are operating in their own organisations. This section seeks to make a final evaluation of the three key elements of the White Paper previously described using the progress reports (Cabinet Office 1997d and 1998f), and also *An Evaluation of Investors in People in the Civil Service* (The Institute for Employment Studies, 1997c).

CENTRAL MONITORING INFORMATION

The summary of key issues in the *Update on Key White Paper Statistics* (Cabinet Office, 1998f) outlines the most recent centrally collected progress monitoring information. Based on the returns submitted by 108 departments and agencies, half of which were submitted either late or incomplete, the update concludes that IiP dominated returns as the main driver for improvement in the 1997/98 year. Cabinet Office therefore were content that good progress has been made in implementing IiP, although the update is critical of the inadequate level of evaluation activity with few reports explaining the contribution that training and development has made to the achievement of business objectives in departments and agencies. Whilst overall spend

on training amounted to 2.95% of staff costs in 1997/98, as compared to 2.75% in 1996/97, and 2.61% in 1995/96, and around 26% of civil servants held professional and vocational qualifications and were working in areas where they are directly applicable, an increase of 3% from 1996/97, the update states that, "at a more fundamental level, however, the importance of having a qualifications strategy, the effectiveness of which can then be measured through monitoring, does not seem to be generally recognised". The inadequacy of equal opportunities data was also highlighted in the summary of key issues (Cabinet Office, 1998f) as was limited benchmarking activity, other than performance comparison against the IiP standard or the Business Excellence Model. The update, however, observed that the artificial boundaries between specialists and generalists are disappearing, with around one fifth of specialists reportedly participating in specific broadening activities.

The response to the data supplied by departments and agencies as part of the central monitoring arrangements overseen by the Cabinet Office, highlights the problems associated with linking training strategy to organisational strategy in decentralised organisations like the Civil Service. Irritation that departments and agencies are not all taking the strategic approach to training and development envisaged by the White Paper (HMSO, 1996) as evidenced by the late and incomplete data which was provided in some cases, poses intrinsic difficulties for the specialist human resource function when this has been devolved from headquarters to divisions, and HRM responsibilities passed down to line managers. There are inherent dangers that the reduction in the number of HR specialists at headquarters potentially denies the decentralised organisation strategic capacity because local managers will have neither the time nor the expertise to develop the integrated approach to HRM that is required (Sisson, 1995, p.75). So whilst

Cabinet Office as the corporate centre of the Civil Service may be critical of the absence of a more strategic approach to HRD in departments and agencies, without recentralisation of some description, the options for control are limited, and the prospects for strategic HRM in this case study less promising.

EVALUATING INVESTORS IN PEOPLE

The Cabinet Office commissioned the *Evaluation of Investors in People in the Civil Service* (The Institute for Employment Studies, 1997c) for two principal reasons: to obtain a service-wide overview of the costs and benefits of implementing IiP, the likely impact and an analysis of the factors which will help or hinder its implementation; and to provide practical guidance to individual Civil Service organisations as they implement their own IiP plans. The report of the survey concluded that whilst the Civil Service has made a good start in reaching its target of having all departments and agencies recognised as Investors in People by the year 2000, the achievement of the target will depend on the extent to which those who find it more difficult to achieve can be supported (p.viii). Ensuring that organisations have the relevant resources and commitment from senior managers to implement the changes necessary to achieve the award, and providing specific support with particularly difficult issues such as training line managers in people management, developing effective training evaluation procedures, and relating training outcomes to business objectives were highlighted as key organisational issues (p.viii).

A quarter of organisations surveyed thought that achieving the award was proving more difficult than expected and highlighted problem areas such as gaining commitment from managers and staff at a time of major organisational change, and "in the wake of

'staff cynicism' and fears of 'initiative overload'", changing training and development practices to meet the standard, and managing the process of achieving the standard (p.v-vi). Whilst the Cabinet Office was seen by survey respondents as a source of assistance, and a number referred to Investors workshops and networking groups as helpful, some expressed resentment at being forced down a route that they felt was not appropriate for their current organisational needs (p.20 and 42). We see in the last comment another problem of using universal linking mechanisms such as IiP in decentralised organisations where priorities and situations are different.

Overall the report states that the benefits of IiP more than outweigh the costs with organisations approaching the standard finding that their approach to training improves with more systematic needs evaluation, better value for money from training spend, and improved internal planning and communication processes leading to "a more skilled and motivated workforce providing a higher quality of service" (p.42). However, as an organisational strategy and training strategy linking mechanism IiP is not without its problems as we shall see when we turn now to make a final test of *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996) key elements against the hypothesis in this case study in the chapter summary and conclusions.

CHAPTER SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

> "At corporate level the task is to link HRD strategy both to wider employee resourcing strategy and practice and to the anticipated and changing demands facing the business. This involves achieving an integration between HR planning, activity arising out of that planning, and organisational and individual learning strategies"
>
> (Harrison, 1997, p.40).

Development and Training for Civil Servants (HMSO, 1996), as the corporately produced training strategy of the Civil Service, is the attempt by the Cabinet Office as the corporate centre to try and ensure that training strategy links to organisational strategy in the decentralised departments and agencies. We have seen in this chapter how the Cabinet Office has tried to monitor the activities of departments and agencies in this respect and the criticism that has been levelled at those organisations which have failed to take a more strategic approach to HRD. The task described by Harrison (1997, p.40) is a difficult one and the linking mechanism used in the White Paper (HMSO, 1996) have clearly been selected with the intention that the integration to which Harrison refers will be accomplished at business unit level in the decentralised departments and agencies.

In recognition of the difficulty of this task, the main report on the consortium project on *Supporting the Individual to Manage and Develop a Career* (The Institute for Employment Studies, 1997b) established that the three key issues that need to be established in step 3 of the 8 step framework are information about the organisational context, the employee context and the HR context (p.15). The HR context is about

what HR processes are in place in departments and agencies and how well those processes are working. Relevant HR context questions relate to the adequacy of communication about HR processes, the frequency and quality of staff feedback, the use of competence frameworks, the availability of access to information about career opportunities, the support for personal development planning, the equity in job filling processes, how self-managed careers relate to corporate career management processes, the access to development activities, and the influence of IiP (p.17-18). All these processes need to be considered with integration in mind (p.23). We have discussed that this report suggests how to work on the issues rather than what the answers should be (p.8). The four 'how' questions are: where to start; what do we need to do; how do we integrate our HR processes; and how do we get 'buy in ' from managers and employees (p.8-9).

When viewed from the management perspective, human resource planning and development (HRPD) is a highly complicated process (Schein, 1978, p.189). Schein's components and interrelationships of an HRPD system (1978, p.191) "show how the HR system can act as the repository of those key processes whereby the aims and interests of organisations and individuals are matched" (Harrison, 1997, p.341). Whilst the actual organisation of such a system will vary between organisations, the components are a minimum checklist of activities which must be present if organisational and individual activities are to remain in balance (Schein, 1978, p.199). Harrison (1997) argues that some central integrative body, such as a career development committee, needs to develop company wide policy, system and procedures for career development, and that this is particularly important in organisations like the Civil

Service that are undergoing fundamental restructuring and the establishment of new pay systems (p.341).

We have seen in this chapter how the Civil Service, rather that taking a centralised integrative approach, has used the linking mechanisms of Investors in People, raising levels of skills and qualifications, and encouraging individuals to take responsibility for their own development and careers to try and ensure that an integrated HRPD system operates in departments and agencies, and that training strategy links to organisational strategy. Throughout *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996) continual reference is made to the organisational strategy that the training strategy is to help deliver. The hypothesis that is being tested in this case study is that when linking organisational strategy and training strategy, the linking mechanisms selected in the training strategy need to be compatible with the organisational strategy and complementary and compatible with one another.

Several obvious inconsistencies have been identified in this chapter and in previous ones, and these will be enlarged upon in the next and final chapter that follows. However, what should be clear is that the thrust of the organisational strategy is to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Civil Service, and the result of this strategy has been a considerable downsizing operation in departments and agencies. At the very time that this has been happening, and middle management jobs have become more heavily loaded, an additional burden has been imposed as a result of the training strategy which has used linking mechanisms that are by their nature labour intensive in their effect on the roles and responsibilities of line managers to make them work. Whilst the central messages about the skills, knowledge and attitudes required to deliver

devolved organisational objectives have been articulated, at a local level communication systems and the internal HRD processes have been deficient. Hence we have nearly one-third of middle managers who say that they have been inadequately trained and developed to deal with job changes in their organisations.

Within the linking mechanisms themselves there are other inconsistencies. Investors in People (IiP) is a national standard for linking training and development activities within organisations to business strategy (Alberga, Tyson and Parsons, 1997, p.47). If the standard operates as it should do in departments and agencies which are accredited or working towards the standard, then at an individual level training strategy should link to the achievement of locally devolved organisational objectives. We have already seen what the middle managers say about how the standard is operating in their own departments and agencies and how this often runs contrary to the spirit and intentions of IiP.

The focus for individual training and development needs with IiP is seen in the context of business objectives, there is little indication of IiP helping facilitate personal development and goals, and where it does occur it is company focused rather than individual focused (Critten, 1993, p.25). This organisational focus conflicts with encouraging people to take responsibility for their own development and careers, and to an extent with raising levels of skills and qualifications, where the emphasis is more on personal development rather than training to meet current job related training and development needs. The White Paper (HMSO, 1996) is cautious about giving an open-ended commitment to personal development stating:

> "Line managers have responsibility for giving their staff the opportunities and motivation to develop the skills and gain the expertise they need to fulfil their team's immediate business objectives and to improve performance. Complementing this wherever possible, they should also provide opportunities for staff to develop greater expertise and wider skills in line with the longer term needs of the organisation" (p.42).

The implicit meaning of self-development, however, is that it will go beyond being tied into meeting more obvious short-term organisation objectives outlined in annual business plans. Linking mechanisms associated with IiP and career management can therefore be in conflict with one another and given that pay systems and selection procedures too may discourage sideways developmental job moves, they may also be at odds with other HR strategies. This perceived lack of fit or integration between internal HRM initiatives will be elaborated in the next chapter. Since the linking mechanisms selected in the training strategy are not completely compatible with the organisational strategy and are not altogether complementary and compatible with one another, we will now go on to look at the implications for the research issue and the lessons that can be learnt from the Civil Service case study.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION AND OVERVIEW

SUMMARY OF KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

The Civil Service is an organisation that has undergone fundamental change in the past two decades. Although the fieldwork for the research started at a time when civil servants had already experienced many changes to working practices in their own organisations, new strategies and policies have been devised by the current Government as part of their public service modernisation and reform agenda. The strength of the research is that it seeks to examine and explain how changes are operating on the ground in the decentralised departments and agencies of the Civil Service. By necessity, however, the research has been constrained by the timeframe in which it has taken place. From the time of the focus groups that were held in 1997 to the follow-up interviews with survey respondents that took place in 1999, many new change initiatives had been conceived and subsequently published in a White Paper on *Modernising Government* (The Stationery Office, 1999). Whilst the key research findings that will be discussed in this first section do not relate to this new mission to modernise public services, there are lessons that can be learnt from the way that other change strategies have worked in practice in the Civil Service. We will return to these lessons in the last section of this chapter.

We will begin by focusing our attention on the key research findings from the data supplied by the middle managers working in the decentralised units of the Civil Service. The structure of this first section mirrors that of previous chapters, and the

findings will be described under the three main headings of organisational strategy, training strategy and linking mechanisms. We will then move in the next section to analyse the findings before considering the implications of the analysis for the Civil Service, and also more widely for other organisations, in the third and final section.

Organisational Strategy and Its Implications for Middle Managers

We have seen in chapter 3 how the Civil Service changes to organisational strategy that have occurred since the 1980s have been grouped together in the literature under the term "new public management" (NPM) and how they had been linked to the themes of *Reinventing Government* (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992). The creation of the 'Next Steps' agencies in 1988 changed the structure of the Civil Service with the separation of the executive functions for government from the policy making role. At the time of the research 77% of permanent civil servants were working for agencies or organisations operating on Next Steps lines (Cabinet Office, 1998a, p.6). Regardless of whether they worked for an agency or not, there was general agreement amongst the middle managers who attended the focus groups that all Civil Service change had been driven the desire for greater efficiency and economy. These observations are in line with the NPM doctrine about organisations doing more for less. The cynicism about change that was expressed at the time by these middle managers, particularly concerning the adoption of private sector management techniques in the public service, was matched by a feeling that they were being overwhelmed by different initiatives in their own organisations.

The survey questionnaire has thrown much light on the way that the jobs of middle managers have changed as a result of the organisational strategy of the Civil Service.

The increase in volume and diversity of work, coupled with more responsibility and accountability was a recurring theme amongst the survey respondents. The effect of increasing workloads, and a focus on achieving measurable targets, had a direct impact on the amount of time that managers were able to devote to their staff management and development responsibilities. Managers reported conflicting pressures associated with more devolved HR responsibilities, including those concerned with achieving the Investors in People (IiP) accreditation, coming during a period of higher workloads and increased accountability for operational, output-driven organisational targets. This is a key finding from the research. As we shall see below, it highlights the incompatibility between the linking mechanisms selected in the training strategy that are labour intensive in terms of the time that line managers need to devote to the tasks, and the current organisational strategy with its desire to deliver more outputs for less inputs. The resultant pressure on the jobs of middle managers has been reflected in some of the differing perceptions around the balance of emphasis between customer service and staff management in departments and agencies.

TRAINING STRATEGY

The Civil Service training strategy as outlined in the *Development and Training for Civil Servants* White Paper (HMSO, 1996) reflects the business-led approach (Harrison, 1997, p.37-38) to strategy development. Given the decentralised organisation structure, however, the training strategy that was initiated by the Cabinet Office as the corporate centre of the Civil Service has been communicated to departments and agencies who have then been left with the responsibility for devising action plans in line with their own, particular organisational needs. A key finding

from the research has been that despite the importance of *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996) more than half of the survey respondents were not aware of its existence nor of its contents. This finding speaks volumes about the difficulties of communicating and applying strategic HRM principles in large decentralised organisations such as the Civil Service. Equally disturbing was the finding from the research that even among those middle managers who were aware of the White Paper there was still a third who did not feel that it had any relevance to them and their jobs. Given the importance of the messages contained in the training strategy this is more than a little disappointing. Whilst the picture improves with regard to knowledge of local training strategies, another key finding is that nearly one-third of managers did not feel that they had been adequately trained and developed to deal with job changes in their departments and agencies. We can therefore safely conclude that despite the best attempts to link organisational strategy and training strategy in the Civil Service, the problems and difficulties of achieving strategic HRD have so far proved too great for a decentralised organisation of this scale, complexity and diversity.

The research identifies the top 14 training and development needs of survey respondents with information technology, communication skills and staff management at the head of the table for needs satisfied for some survey respondents but remaining outstanding for others. Although half of the managers indicated that there were immediate plans to meet their training requirements, another key research finding is that the annual appraisal process, combined with managers requesting training and development for themselves, remains the main way in which training is planned in departments and agencies. The skills of line managers to be able to

properly identify the training and development needs of their staff, however, remains questionable. With so many training needs outstanding, and managers reporting concerns about the timing of training events, and organising their own training and development, the findings do beg the question about how equipped civil servants are at all levels to undertake training needs analysis, whether it be on themselves or on their staff. Self identification of training needs can be a very introspective process and is not necessarily one that individuals will be best placed to undertake, particularly when looking at their own personal development needs where insights into behaviour will often be informed by feedback from others.

The picture with regard to the methods of training and development adopted by departments and agencies is not very far removed from the previous somewhat pessimistic findings about the reality of the training strategy in the Civil Service. Despite academic comment about the use of traditional training methods becoming outdated, attending courses continues to be the most popular form of training reported by the middle managers. Although very few survey respondents planned to use on-the-job training techniques, when questioned about the training and development they had received, there was a greater awareness that this was a method that they had adopted. Whilst coaching therefore may be more widely used than at first appreciated, the use of mentoring, secondments, action learning, and attendance at a Development Centre remains very much for the few fortunate civil servants rather than being accepted methods of training and development for the majority. The move to self-development therefore as envisaged in *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1966) still seems a long way removed from the training reality operating in departments and agencies.

Of concern too is the distribution of survey respondents between those working for agencies and departments given that the sample was drawn from students who had attended training at the Civil Service College. With only just over a third of managers working for an agency as compared to the 77% of permanent civil servants working for agencies or organisations operating on Next Steps lines (Cabinet Office, 1998a, p.6) it would appear that agencies are less willing to use external training provision than departments. The prospects for using corporate training events to disseminate plans and messages that the centre wishes to communicate will be considerably reduced if agencies rely mainly on internal training courses.

Linking Mechanisms

The research has revealed some key findings about the way in which the mechanisms used in the training strategy to try and make the link with organisational strategy are operating in the decentralised departments and agencies. With the Civil Service committed to achieving Investors in People (IiP) in all its units by the year 2000, it is unsurprising to identify that 96% of survey respondents stated that their departments and agencies had either been awarded the standard, or that they were working towards achieving it. Given that almost universal commitment to IiP, it is therefore disappointing to find that over a third of managers stated that working towards or achieving IiP had not effected their jobs. It is even more disconcerting to see that a further 12% of respondents volunteered that one of the main effects that it had on their jobs was to increase the amount of paperwork that they are required to handle. The increased bureaucracy associated with IiP, and the focus on identifying and satisfying short-term training and development needs, is a recurring theme coming out

of the research. Managers have made the point that with IiP, training needs are reviewed against the organisation's business objectives rather than the longer-term career development aspirations of individual staff. This has created problems for managers wishing to embrace the notion of self-development by, for example, acquiring additional academic qualifications that will help further their career development in the future.

Many middle managers, however, already possess fairly high level academic qualifications and, with over a third of survey respondents holding a first degree, the existing skill base is not insignificant. The skill base is also increasing with nearly half of the managers surveyed taking additional qualifications since joining the Civil Service, much of this funded by their own organisations. The resounding lack of organisational interest in obtaining maximum benefit from the enhanced skills and knowledge by failing to use people who have acquired new qualifications in more suitable jobs is another theme that has emerged from the research findings. Given the complex relationship between skills and improved business performance identified in the academic literature (Keep, 1999) raising skill levels on its own is going to prove difficult as an effective organisational strategy and training strategy linking mechanism.

The research into the linking mechanisms has identified some key inconsistencies in the way in which they are operating on the ground in the decentralised departments and agencies. These inconsistencies are most apparent in the experience of managers about how their careers are, or are not, being self-managed. Although more than half of the survey respondents felt that they were responsible for managing their careers,

there was much less clarity as to how this career development was to be achieved with most mangers relying on applying for advertised vacancies to secure job moves. The lack of organisational support for people to engage in developmental activities, combined with an absence of skills amongst line managers and individuals to recognise longer-term developmental needs and opportunities, has proved to be a big handicap in making the notion of self-managed careers a reality in departments and agencies. As a result, the psychological contract for many managers appears to be out of balance with some either looking to leave the Civil Service or feeling trapped in jobs with no real prospects of moving to another suitable posting.

Apart from the inconsistencies in the linking mechanisms that have already been described, another key research finding is the lack of fit or integration between the internal HRM initiatives. We shall elaborate on this point in the next section. However, for the present, as stated in the last chapter, the linking mechanisms associated with IiP and career management can be in conflict with one another with their respective focus on short-term objectives and longer-term development. In the same way that the research has found that the linking mechanisms selected in the training strategy are not completely compatible with the organisational strategy neither are they altogether complementary and compatible with one another. We move now to an explanation of the research findings with the aim of achieving a better understanding of the tensions facing decentralised organisations such as the Civil Service.

TENSIONS BETWEEN STRATEGIES AND STYLES

The role of the corporate centre in managing diversified organisations is of vital importance (Goold and Campbell, 1987, p.15) and many of the key research findings have at their roots the issues surrounding the problems and challenges associated with decentralisation. We first looked at the work of Goold and Campbell (1987) in chapter 3 where we recognised that the Civil Service is operating with a 'strategic control' model of organisation structure. The framework documents under which the 'Next Steps' agencies operate include details of their aims and objectives and financial management arrangements and the setting of clear, stretching performance targets is part of the underpinning philosophy. More recently, the Labour Government has introduced 28 separate Public Service Agreements (PSAs) with more than 350 new performance targets for the public services (Treasury, 1998). Although critical academic comment has been made about the inadequacies of performance reporting by agencies (Hyndman and Anderson, 1998) there still remains a preoccupation with control.

When it comes to the HRM/HRD strategy for the Civil Service, however, what we see is the adoption by the corporate centre of a different approach, one that is modelled on the 'strategic planning' style. Planning influence concerns the efforts by the centre to shape strategies as they emerge and before decisions are taken (Goold and Campbell, 1987, p.36). Hence we see in *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996) the corporately determined training strategy for the Civil Service designed to try and link organisational strategy to training strategy in departments and agencies.

The next sub-section will explore these two different styles in more detail and use them as a basis for analysing the research findings to explain some of the pressures that are being experienced by middle managers as a result of the changes that have been implemented in their organisations.

STRATEGIC CONTROL VERSUS STRATEGIC PLANNING MODELS

Control influence concerns the way that the centre reacts to the results that are achieved in the decentralised units and the setting of objectives is the first step in the control process (Goold and Campbell, 1987, p.40). We have seen from the key findings that one of the main recurring themes coming from the middle managers was the effect of increased accountability on their jobs. The more pronounced focus on reviewing performance against individual objectives, the achievement of which is linked to performance related pay, elicited a combination of critical comment and some satisfaction from the middle managers surveyed. What was clear, however, was that the downward pressure of the control process, exercised through the setting of individual performance targets, means that priority will continue to be given to those aspects of the middle managers jobs that are measured against recognised organisational performance indicators.

Despite the surprising lack of clarity amongst managers concerning how business objectives had changed in their own organisations and implications for the effectiveness of targets in driving change in the Civil Service, all of the middle managers interviewed had their own operational objectives as part of the performance management system. Concern, however, remains about how SMART their objectives are and exactly how their performance is being monitored. With control influence the

follow through on performance achieved is important and where bonuses are linked to the achievement of performance targets, or where there is an impact on career advancement, the pressure of the control process is enhanced (Goold and Campbell, 1987, p.41). The strong message coming from the research is that the strategic control style has had a big impact on the jobs of middle managers in the Civil Service.

When we look at the effect of the strategic planning style through the eyes of the middle managers, however, we get a different perspective. Planning influence is a measure of the corporate centre's contribution to the strategies developed in the decentralised units. The degree of influence will be effected by factors such as the organisation structure, the review processes and the guidance that is given by the centre (Goold and Campbell, 1987, p.36). We have seen in the research findings that the attempts by the Cabinet Office to influence departments and agencies to link their organisational strategy to their training strategy by the linking mechanisms outlined in the *Development and Training for Civil Servants* White Paper (HMSO, 1996) have been fraught with difficulties. Not only have some of the key messages failed to get through to the managers responsible for implementing the strategy in their own organisations, but the departments and agencies too have resented the requirement to provide central monitoring information. They have manifested this resentment by supplying late or incomplete returns (Cabinet Office, 1998f). Although Cabinet Office was content about the progress made towards achieving the IiP standard across the Civil Service, some departments and agencies have again resented being forced down a route that they considered was inappropriate for their own organisational needs (The Institute for Employment Studies, 1997c). The middle managers, particularly those with line management responsibilities, have been some of the main

recipients of these tensions between strategies and styles, as we shall see now when we look in more detail at the pressures on them and their jobs.

THE PRESSURES ON LINE MANAGERS

The research shows how the role of the line manager is crucial in helping to link organisational strategy to training strategy in the decentralised departments and agencies. Our previous discussion has also identified the organisational tensions that occur as a result of conflicting strategies and styles. It is in the role of line managers that the tensions in the organisation, and on the individuals working in those organisations, come together in their quest to deliver organisational objectives. As the representative of the organisation in the 'line' the manager is accountable to the organisation above, and also to the staff who are managed below.

Figure 7.1 summarises these perceived influences in terms of 'hard' and 'soft' forces driving the line manager and impacting on his or her job. The model is an adaptation of forcefield analysis which is an approach to problem solving and decision making which was originally advanced by Lewin (Rae, 1995, p.82). The choice of 'hard' and 'soft' descriptions of the forces on the line manager relate to the 'hard' version of HRM which emphasises quantitative, calculative and business-strategic aspects of people management as opposed to the 'soft' version emphasising communication, motivation and leadership (Storey, 1989, p.8).

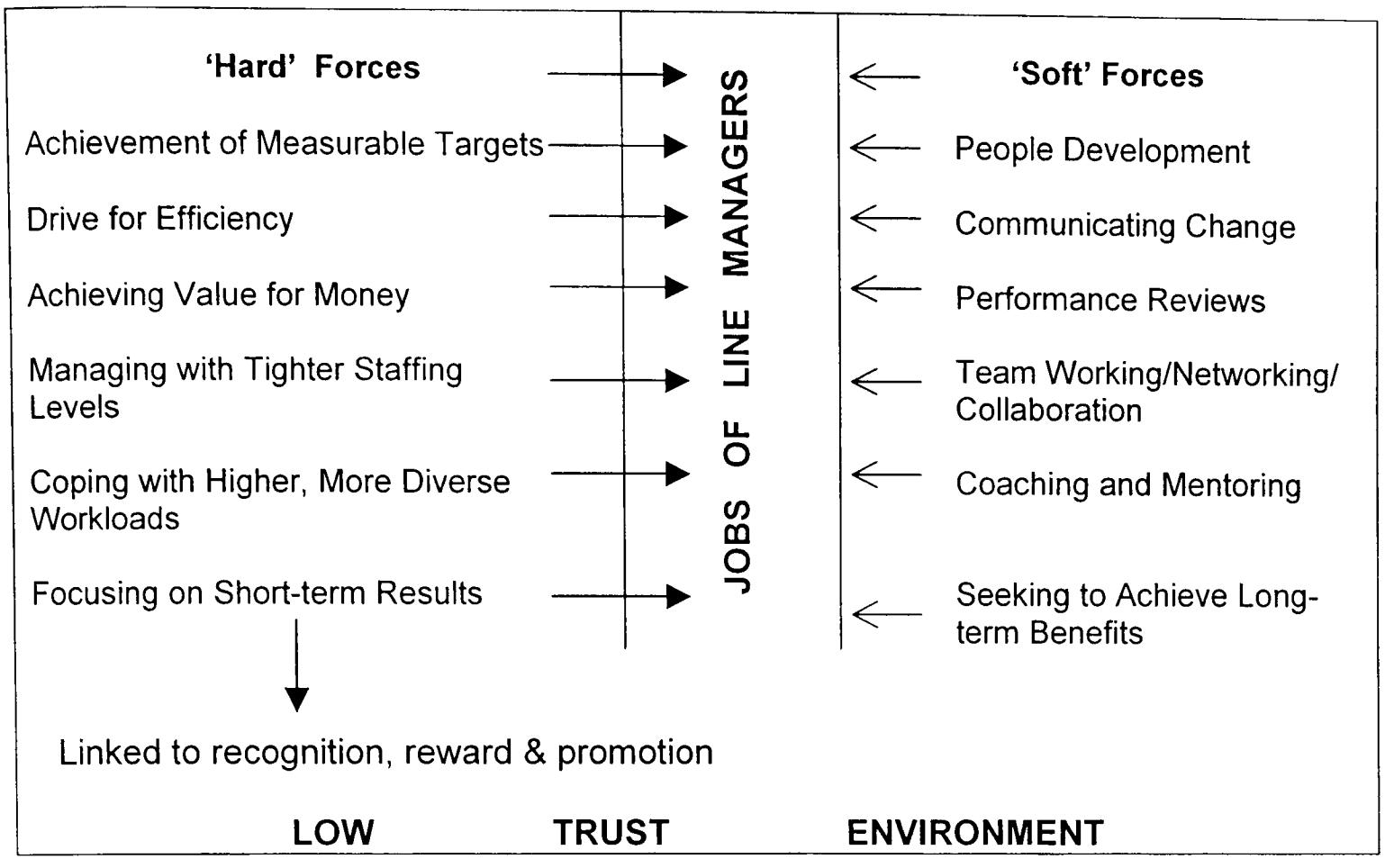


Fig 7.1 Forces Driving the Line Manager

The 'hard' forces driving the jobs of line managers are those that can be clearly seen from the Conservative Government's reform agenda and the associated downsizing of the Civil Service in the quest for more outputs for less inputs, and greater efficiency and effectiveness. Given the changes to organisation structure and the decentralisation of the Civil Service with the 'Next Steps' initiative, these forces also represent the effect of control influence in departments and agencies with the focus on short-term results and the achievement of measurable objectives.

The 'soft' forces on the other hand are those required to deliver the training strategy as outlined in *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996) and to make the link with organisational strategy. They are therefore the forces associated with planning influence as exercised by the Cabinet Office as the corporate centre of the Civil Service. The research findings have clearly demonstrated that it is these 'soft' forces on the right hand of the model that have been less effective in driving the

jobs of line managers. The "business first, staff management second" quote from a middle manager who was interviewed sums up perfectly the conflict that line managers experience when trying to effectively discharge their people development responsibilities in times of greater accountability and increasing workloads. As a result, changing business objectives are not communicated properly, particularly at lower levels of the organisational hierarchy, and line managers remain insufficiently trained and developed, and also unwilling to undertake regular performance reviews on their staff, and assume coaching and mentoring responsibilities. Given this reality, initiatives such as Investors in People (IiP) fail to bring the organisational and individual benefits envisaged by the standard that becomes instead a bureaucratic mechanism for ensuring that the appropriate paperwork is in place to satisfy the IiP assessors.

Moreover, the lack of attention given to the achievement of long-term rather than short-term organisational benefits makes it difficult for line managers to help their staff with career planning and development. The research has identified that within the HRM strategy itself there are sometimes conflicting policies with, for example, the use of recruitment based on job specific selection against advertised vacancies which reduces the scope for horizontal and lateral development moves. Recruiters give preference to applicants who already hold the competencies and can be immediately effective in the job whilst applicants are sometimes reluctant to move if they feel performance related pay awards will be put at risk in unfamiliar job roles.

The model shows that the 'hard' forces which are linked to recognition, reward and promotion will have the greater impact on the jobs of line managers, particularly

given the low trust environment that is currently operating in departments and agencies. The pragmatic approaches to HRM previously identified by academics (Ahlstrand and Purcell, 1988; Purcell, 1989; Rainbird, 1994) will therefore continue unless more priority is given to the 'soft' forces that impact on the jobs of line managers. However, given the 'strategic control' and 'strategic planning' styles that are operating, without the use of some sort of integrative body such as the co-ordinating committee mentioned by Goold and Campbell (1987, p.37) external influence on HR planning decisions in departments and agencies is likely to continue to remain weak.

Building on this contention we will move now to the final section of this chapter where we will look at what this means for the design of future HRM strategies, both in the Civil Service and also more widely in other decentralised organisations.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE STRATEGIES

The subject of strategic HRM has continued to generate research interest with more evidence to substantiate the link between HR and the bottom line in private sector organisations (Griffiths, 1999, p.87) although this is a subject of considerable academic dispute (Edwards and Wright, 1999).

The findings from this research support the need for organisations to adopt a configurational approach to strategic HRM and HRD as evidenced by the requirement for the linking mechanisms in *Development and Training for Civil Servants* (HMSO, 1996) to be compatible both with the organisational strategy and with each other. However, since the fieldwork was conducted there have been new corporate strategies

devised that are based on the best practice approach to strategic HRM. The first subsection will evaluate these new developments before moving on to draw some final conclusions about what might be the way forward for future training and wider HRM strategies.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS – ONE BEST WAY OR MANY?

Following the publication of *Modernising Government* (The Stationery Office, 1999) the Permanent Heads of the main departments comprising the Management Board met at the Civil Service College in September 1999 to discuss reports on *Vision and Common Principles*, *Performance Management*, *Diversity*, and *Bringing in and Bringing on Talent* (Civil Service Management Committee Sub-Groups, 1999a-d). They also discussed the Performance and Innovation Unit report on *Bridging the Divide* (1999) and committed themselves to drive forward a new agenda of Civil Service reform, both corporately and in their own departments (Wilson, 1999a, p.1). As a result of their meeting a *Report to the Prime Minister from Sir Richard Wilson, Head of the Home Civil Service* (Wilson, 1999a) set out the agreed action.

Figure 7.2 summarises the key themes and key actions from the report.

Summary of Key Themes and Key Actions

Stronger leadership with a clear sense of purpose

- Provide leadership to the Civil Service on the change programme and on the statement of Civil Service vision and values.
- Start a debate in every department and agency on the vision and values agreed by the CSMB.
- Embed the new approach.
- Promote a successful, high-achieving Civil Service.
- Design benchmarks within and outside the Civil Service to measure progress and operation.
- Define the leadership qualities required for the Senior Civil Service (SCS) and for the rest of the Service subsequently. Develop leadership styles.
- Put the leadership models into practice.
- Promote more corporate leadership.
- Promote leadership development including the launch of a Public Service Leaders scheme.

Better business planning and sharper performance management

- Review business planning systems.
- Establish independent quality assurance for business planning systems on a three-yearly basis.
- Review performance management systems and appraisal systems against the principles in the Performance Management Report, and align them where necessary.
- Revise and pilot competency framework for the SCS.

A dramatic improvement in diversity

- Raise awareness.
- Demonstrate leadership. Include equal opportunities and diversity objectives in departmental business plans and audit performance against them.
- Develop management capability. Provide training on valuing diversity and managing inclusion for all managers within two years.
- Promote equal opportunities.

A more open Civil Service which brings on talent

- Bring in people with fresh ideas and ways of working.
- Invest in people. Set up comprehensive management development programmes.
- Develop talent through relevant secondments and training in other government departments and external organisations.
- Value people with wider experience.

A better deal for staff

- Cabinet Office to work with departments to draw together actions to work up a better deal for staff.

Figure 7.2 Key Actions from the Report to the Prime Minister from Sir Richard Wilson on Civil Service Reform

In total the desire to achieve stronger leadership, better business planning, sharper performance management, a dramatic improvement in diversity, a Service more open

which brings on talent, and a better deal for staff generated 65 key actions. Whilst there are a lot of objectives contained in the report, what is not discussed is how they are going to be implemented across the Civil Service. Departments have been charged with preparing their own action plans for making the changes happen in their own organisations with change agents given the responsibility for this task, and to help them a new Modernisation Fund of £100 million over two years has been set up to support the programme. Change champions have been appointed from among the Permanent Secretaries to help drive the changes corporately. The question, however, remains as to how effectively the corporate centre can ensure that the changes will be delivered in the ways that the report envisages given the previous experiences of strategy implementation in the complex decentralised organisation structure of the Civil Service.

The report (Wilson, 1999a) received critical comment at the time about its supposed inability to separate out good management practice from politicisation (Hutton, 1999, p.28) although this suggestion was totally rejected by Sir Richard Wilson (Wilson, 1999b, p.19). It has been described by other commentators as being the biggest revolution in Whitehall since the 1960s (Hencke, 1999, p.1). Notwithstanding these conflicting observations, the one thing that is clear is that this new agenda is a return to recentralisation with the corporate centre taking responsibility for moving reform forward in the decentralised departments and agencies. Moreover, it demonstrates the use of a best practice strategic HRM model by the Cabinet Office that is seeking to apply the key actions universally across departments and agencies to produce the best results, irrespective of the circumstances of the individual units.

At first sight therefore it appears that senior management in the Civil Service may have learnt the lessons from the difficulties of using the *Development and Training for Civil Servants* White Paper (HMSO, 1996) as part of a strategic planning style to try and link organisational strategy to training strategy. They are now adopting a strengthened strategic planning style that aims to exert more influence on departments and agencies. Other questions, however, remain about the effectiveness of a one best way approach that attempts to impose a single HRM model on a decentralised organisation structure operating on a strategic control style. The unanswered question is whether the authors of the new reform agenda have grasped the issues around strategies and styles as previously discussed or whether they are focussing on technicist solutions to problems. Purcell's (1989, p.90) pessimistic conclusion that trends in corporate strategy in decentralised organisation structures make the ideals of HRM unachievable may not be so far removed from the reality of the situation facing the Civil Service. Certainly without a proper appreciation of how strategies that are initiated at corporate level will operate on the ground in the decentralised departments and agencies using a well thought out implementation plan, achieving strategic HRM is likely to remain an aspiration rather than a reality.

The Civil Service experience of trying to link organisational strategy and training strategy, however, is not merely of use in informing new strategies that will be applied across departments and agencies. It has been contended that the research findings can be generalised and applied to other situations and organisations. The final sub-section will therefore take a last look at what other organisations might learn from what the Civil Service has attempted to do.

LESSONS LEARNT – SOLUTIONS OR MORE PROBLEMS?

As a decentralised public sector organisation, the difficulties that the Civil Service has faced with applying strategic HRM/HRD principles are not dissimilar to those experienced by other diversified organisations in the wider public and private sectors. Although there is a danger with taking an analogy between the public service and the corporate sector too far, academics have asserted that there are important messages that the public service can learn from the Goold and Campbell (1987) research into strategies and styles (Jervis and Richards, 1997, p.14). Jervis and Richards (1997) argue that the requirement to tackle "wicked problems" in the public service requires a strategic planning style.

In the same way as the public service can learn from the research undertaken in the private sector so can the Civil Service share learning with companies operating with a decentralised organisation structure. Whilst accepting that there are differences between HRM practices in the public and private sectors, the distinctions have become less pronounced over time (Boyne, Jenkins, and Poole, 1999, p.417). The common problems around the pressures on line managers to deliver measurable operational objectives whilst at the same time discharging their HR responsibilities effectively are ones that effect all managers regardless of the organisations in which they work.

These common problems have been highlighted in the research into career management in organisations with an acceptance of a need for realism about what line managers can deliver for their staff (Hirsh, Jackson, and Jackson, 1995, p.37). Whilst skills training in counselling and mentoring, and information on skill requirements

and career opportunities in other work areas will help managers, Hirsh, Jackson, and Jackson (1995, p.37) recognise the need to allow managers the time in their jobs to take on this role. However, whilst there are numerous ways that line managers can be supported to effectively discharge their people development responsibilities, without an associated change in organisational priorities as described at figure 7.1 the inherent problems are still likely to remain.

Whilst the literature on strategic HRM would talk about the question of the integration of internal HRM components that need to fit with and support each other (Baird and Meshoulam, 1988, p.122) the vocabulary of "fit" is not particularly helpful when applying standard private sector models to the public sector. In the Civil Service it is instead more helpful to think of competing claims or priorities that occur because resources are finite. Adopting a configurational approach to strategic HRM accepts that HR practices need to fit with each other as well as with other strategies.

The three main theoretical approaches to strategic HRM namely best practice, contingency and configurational have been highlighted in an academic literature review commissioned by the Institute of Personnel and Development (IPD). As a reminder of these approaches, whilst the best practice approach asserts a particular set of HR policies as the key to performance in all situations, the contingency approach requires a fit with other organisational factors to be effective. The configurational approach, on the other hand, emphasises the need for the practices to fit with each other, as well as with other strategies (Baron and Collard, 1999, p.41).

We have seen in the last sub-section how corporately the Civil Service is adopting a best practice approach but at the same time expecting the decentralised departments and agencies to apply a muted configurational approach to strategic HRM in their organisations. This poses the question as to whether the complexity attached to using a combination of these different approaches in decentralised organisation structures has been recognised at corporate level. There appears to be a heavy reliance on tools such as competency frameworks for the 3,000 members of the Senior Civil Service to help promote culture change with new performance management systems focusing on the delivery of outcomes, and personal development and rewards. The appropriateness of a best practice strategic HRM approach in the Civil Service, however, remains questionable and is also likely to be one that will promote objections from departments and agencies as they grapple with the requirements of applying centrally decided HR policies and practices in their own organisations. Adopting a configurational approach would by implication mean that a corporately driven best practice model would not be possible. Whether the corporate centre trusts departments and agencies sufficiently to use this approach is debatable.

We are then in interesting times and there will be more lessons to be learnt about strategic HRM in the future. It remains to be seen whether the Civil Service or other decentralised organisations in the wider public and private sectors will ever accept Purcell's (1989) pessimistic conclusion about the prospects for strategic HRM. However, it may be that a proper recognition of the difficulties would of itself be a positive step forward for the Civil Service. Then rather than looking for integrated HRM solutions, work can be undertaken on helping departments and agencies devise their own HR policies which will best satisfy their individual needs. Of all the lessons

learnt this could be the most valuable and one that could be shared with other organisations facing similar sorts of challenges.

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Attendance

Training & Development Needs of Middle Managers in the New Civil Service Focus Group

22 May 1997 1200 - 1400 Belgrave Road, London

Department

Lord Chancellors Department
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Home Office
Health & Safety Executive
Ministry of Defence
Department of Transport
Department of the Environment

5 June 1997 1200 - 1400 Quarry House, Leeds

Child Support Agency
Department of Social Security
Benefits Agency
NHS Executive
Employment Service
Department for Education and Employment
Driving Standards Agency

APPENDIX II – FOCUS GROUPS: Programme

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF MIDDLE MANAGERS IN THE NEW CIVIL SERVICE

FOCUS GROUPS THURSDAY 22 MAY AND 5 JUNE

PROGRAMME

Introductions

- Facilitator (Julia Hockey) to introduce self and explain purpose of focus group
- Participants to briefly introduce themselves (name, department/agency and job)

Background to Civil Service Reforms

- Facilitator to give a short (10 minute) presentation on the main Civil Service reforms since the Financial Management Initiative (1982)
- Participants to reflect on how their own organisation, and their work as managers, has changed as a result of these reforms

Questions for Participants

- What is your perception of the Civil Service changes that have taken place in the last 5 years and what has been the impact of change on your department or agency?
- In what ways have the requirements of your job changed?
- What do you consider to be the key skills and attitudes that are essential for you to discharge your duties effectively?
- How do these skills and attitudes vary from those required in your organisation 5 years or so ago?
- If you were asked to categorise these skills/attitudes what sort of headings would you use?
- What training and development activities have you undertaken in recent years?
- What is your perception of the training and development offered to meet your particular needs?
- Do you have any training and development requirements that are not being addressed? Is so, why not?
- Are you aware of the Development and Training for Civil Servants White Paper?
- What are your views of the Government's attempt to link organisational strategy and training strategy in the New Civil Service?
- Do you know what the training strategy is for your own organisation?
- Has your organisation achieved the Investors in People standard?

APPENDIX III

STATISTICAL CALCULATION OF SAMPLE SIZE FOR SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

This appendix outlines in detail the processes that have been followed, and the calculations that have been made, in order to arrive at a statistically valid sample size for the survey questionnaire which has been used as a source of evidence in the Civil Service case study. The description that follows has been taken from the quantitative approaches as applied to statistical sampling explained by Morris (1989, p.183-202).

The statistical calculations are based on the key concept of probability sampling where, "In the process of selecting the sample, these three conditions apply: the number of items in the sample, say n, is fixed and known in advance; as each item of the sample is selected there are two possible outcomes – either it has, or does not have, the characteristic we are interested in; the probability of selecting an item with the characteristic remains constant, and is known to be P per cent" (Morris, 1989, p.186). Morris explains that this "sampling distribution of percentages" is based on the assumption that simple random samples are taken from a population that is infinitely large so removing the sample makes no effective difference to the population, the distribution is therefore a binomial distribution. Adding a further assumption that the sample, n, is large, containing 30 or more items, Morris (p.187) states that the normal approximation to the binomial distribution can be used to calculate sample size. The two

parameters which define a normal distribution are the mean and the standard deviation, and Morris gives examples of how these parameters are calculated. She says that "the mean number of items with the characteristic we are interested in, in samples of n items chosen at random, will be np, where p is the probability of an item having the characteristic". Converting the numerical standard deviation of this mean number, namely $\sqrt{np(1-p)}$, to percentages expressed as a percentage of the sample, Morris arrives at what she calls "STEP", the standard error of percentages (p.188) which is expressed as;

$$\text{STEP} = \sqrt{\frac{P(100 - P) \quad \%}{n}}$$

where P is the percentage of the population with the particular characteristic.

In the same way as the standard deviation measures the spread around the mean so STEP measures how the sample values differ from the mean P, the population value, and therefore gives an indication of the error that might be made if the sample value is used instead of the population value. Applying STEP to calculate the sample size that would be required in order to estimate a population percentage with a given degree of accuracy also necessitates determining the confidence level. A 95% confidence requirement is normal which involves going 1.96 standard deviations either side of the mean of the normal distribution; for most purposes it is sufficiently accurate to round off 1.96 to 2 (Morris, p.193). If Morris' advice is followed, the 95% confidence requirement would be equal to 2 x STEP

Applying the formulae described above to the survey sample, a decision was made about the accuracy of the data collected. It was considered that a figure of 5% either way from the true percentage of middle managers who feel that they have been adequately trained and developed to do their jobs would be sufficient. Combining this percentage with the STEP calculation leads to Morris' statement, "at worst, these two things must be equal to each other: 2 x STEP = 5, whence STEP = 2.5" (p.195). The equation for n, the sample size, is therefore:

$$\sqrt{\frac{P(100-P)}{n}} = 2.5$$

Inverting this equation to find n involves squaring each side and arriving at:

$$n = \frac{P(100-P)}{6.25}$$

The value of P, however, is unknown and Morris advises working on a worst case scenario where the value of P, if it should occur, would give rise to the largest error. She says (p.195), "if you have no prior information as to roughly what P might be, assuming it's 50% will give you a sample which is more than big enough to cope with any other value of P". Adopting this advice, the calculations for the sample size for the survey questionnaire are as follows:

$$n = \frac{50(100-50)}{6.25}$$

$$= \frac{50 \times 50}{6.25}$$

$$= \frac{2500}{6.25}$$

$$n = 400$$

If a more precise figure of 1.96 standard deviations had been applied to the calculation instead of rounding up to 2, the required sample size (n) would have been 384 rather than 400.

Given that a total of 114,160 permanent full-time equivalent civil servants worked in the middle management grades in 1996 (Cabinet Office, 1996, p.40), this sample size is modest. Combined with a realistic estimation of questionnaire return rates, however, a decision was made to increase the sample size to 1000.

APPENDIX IV - SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT NEEDS QUESTIONNAIRE

A. PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. Are you?
   Please tick the box ❒ Male ❒ Female

2. How old are you?
   Please enter your age in years _____ *yrs*

3. How long have you been working for the Civil Service?
   Please enter length of employment in years _____ *yrs*

B. JOB INFORMATION

4. Please give your job title and briefly describe your current job

   Job Title _____

   Description: _____

   _____

5. Would you classify this job as policy or operations work?
   Please tick one box ❒ Policy ❒ Operations

6. Are you a specialist?
   Please tick one box ❒ Yes ❒ No

   If yes, what is your specialism? _____

7. For what department of the Civil Service do you work?
   Please tick one box

   ❒ Agriculture, Fisheries & Food
   ❒ Crown Prosecution Service
   ❒ Customs & Excise
   ❒ Defence
   ❒ Education & Employment
   ❒ Environment, Transport & the Regions
   ❒ Foreign & Commonwealth Office
   ❒ Health
   ❒ Home Office
   ❒ Inland Revenue
   ❒ Lord Chancellors Dept.
   ❒ Social Security
   ❒ Trade & Industry
   ❒ Scottish Office
   ❒ Other

Continued overleaf .....

8. Do you work for an agency?
Please tick one box

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please give the name of your agency _____

9. What is your grade or equivalent grade?
Please tick one box

☐ HEO ☐ SEO
☐ Grade 7 ☐ Other

C. EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

10. What was your grade (or equivalent) on entry to the Civil Service?

Please tick one box

☐ AA ☐ AO ☐ EO
☐ HEO ☐ SEO ☐ Grade 7
☐ Other

11. What departments have you worked for?
Please tick as many boxes as appropriate

☐ Agriculture, Fisheries & Food
☐ Crown Prosecution Service
☐ Customs & Excise
☐ Defence
☐ Education & Employment
☐ Environment, Transport & the Regions
☐ Foreign & Commonwealth Office
☐ Health
☐ Home Office
☐ Inland Revenue
☐ Lord Chancellors Dept.
☐ Social Security
☐ Trade & Industry
☐ Scottish Office
☐ Other

12. How many agencies have your worked for in the departments?
Please enter the number in the box and name the agencies

No of Agencies ☐

Name of Agencies _____

_____

_____

13. What educational or vocational qualifications did you hold above GCE 'O' level or Scottish equivalent on joining the Civil Service?

Please tick one or more boxes

- ❒ G.C.E. 'A' level
- ❒ Scottish Highers
- ❒ Certificate/ Diploma
- ❒ First Degree
- ❒ Postgraduate degree
- ❒ Vocational qualifications
- ❒ Other
- ❒ None

14. Have you obtained any additional job relevant qualifications since then?

Please tick one box ❒ Yes ❒ No

If 'Yes' please tick one or more boxes as appropriate

- ❒ G.C.E. 'A' level
- ❒ Scottish Highers
- ❒ Certificate/ Diploma
- ❒ First Degree
- ❒ Postgraduate degree
- ❒ Vocational qualifications
- ❒ Other

15. Did you receive any assistance from the Civil Service to achieve your qualifications?

Please tick one box ❒ Yes ❒ No

If 'Yes' please tick one or more boxes to indicate the type of assistance received

- ❒ Help with fees
- ❒ Books
- ❒ Project work
- ❒ Travel & subsistence
- ❒ Study leave
- ❒ Other

Continued overleaf .....

D. TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

16. Have your department/agency's business objectives changed over the past 3 years?
Please tick one box ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know

If "Yes" please specify these changes

_____

_____

_____

_____

17 How have these changes impacted on your job?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

18. Do you feel that you have been adequately trained/developed to deal with these changes?
Please tick one box ☐ Yes ☐ No

19. Please state those areas where you feel you have been adequately trained/ developed in the past 3 years

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

20. What training and development needs are still outstanding?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

21. Are there any immediate plans to meet these requirements?
Please tick one box ❑ Yes ❑ No

If 'Yes' please specify these plans

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

22. How was the training and development that you received provided?

Please tick all boxes that apply

- ❑ External training course(s)
- ❑ Internal training course(s) in your department/agency
- ❑ On-the-job training
- ❑ Open Learning
- ❑ Development Centre
- ❑ Secondment(s)
- ❑ Job shadowing
- ❑ Use of a mentor
- ❑ Resource centre
- ❑ Project work
- ❑ Action Learning Group
- ❑ Other, please specify

_____

_____

Continued overleaf .....

23. How would you rate the quality of the training and development overall?

Please tick one box from each row in the table

	Very Good	Good	Indifferent	Poor	Very Poor
Relevance					
Timing					
Content					
Delivery					

24. How is your training and development planned?

Please tick one or more boxes, as appropriate

- ☐ Annual appraisal
- ☐ Reviews
- ☐ Own request
- ☐ Not planned
- ☐ Other, Please specify

_____

_____

25. What progress has your department or agency made towards becoming an Investor in People (IiP)?

Please tick one box

- ☐ Achieved IiP standard
- ☐ Working towards IiP standard
- ☐ Don't know

26. If your department or agency has achieved IiP or is working towards it, how has this affected your job?

_____

_____

_____

27. Are you aware of the Development and Training for Civil Servants White Paper?

Please tick one box ☐ Yes ☐ No

28. How relevant do you feel this White Paper is to you?
Please tick one box

❒ Relevant ❒ Not relevant

Please give reasons for your answer

_____

_____

29. Does your department/agency have a training strategy?
Please tick one box ❒ Yes ❒ No ❒ Don't know

30 Have the contents of this strategy been communicated to you?
Please tick one box ❒ Yes ❒ No

31. What does your organisation hope to achieve by its training strategy?

_____

_____

32. Who do you feel is responsible for managing your career?

Please tick one box

❒ You

❒ You and your line manager together

❒ Your line manager

❒ Somebody else
Please specify the person

_____

33. What do you think your next career move should be (excluding promotion)?

_____

_____

_____

34. How realisable is this?
Please tick one box ❒ Very ❒ Quite ❒ Not at all realisable

Continued overleaf .....

35. How do you intend to achieve this career move?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

36. Are you willing for your line manager to be contacted as part of this survey?
Please see covering letter and tick one box ☐ Yes ☐ No

37. If you have answered 'Yes' to question 36, what is the name and telephone of your line manager?

Name _____

Telephone No. _____

38. If you are prepared to be part of the follow-up survey, please enter your name and telephone number here

Name _____

Telephone No. _____

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

Please return your completed questionnaire to:

Julia Hockey
Civil Service College
FREEPOST (SL2290)
Sunningdale Park
Larch Avenue
ASCOT, Berks SL5 0YZ (no stamp needed)

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT QUESTIONNAIRE
Basic Details

(A) Personal Information					(B) Job Information									(C) Employment History																		(D
	Q1		Q2	Q3	Q5			Q6		Q7	Q8		Q9	Q10	Q11		Q12	Q13	Q14		Q15									Q16		Q18		Q21		
Q No	Gender		Age	Len of Ser	Type of Work			Spec'st		Dept	Agency?		Grade	Entry Grade	Other Depts?		No of Ags Work	Highest Entry Qual	Addit Quals		What Qual?	Assistance from C/S								Bus Obs			Adeq Trg?		Trng Plans		
	M	F			P	O	B	Y	N		Y	N			Y	N			Y	N		Y	N	1	2	3	4	5	6	Y	N	D	Y	N	Y	N	T
1		1	2	1	1			1		15		1	7	7		1	0	1		1			1							1			1		1		
2	1		2	3	1				1	5		1	7	AO		1	1	2		1										1			1				
3	1		1	2			1	1		4		1	7	O		1	1	1	1		7	1		1						1			1				
4		1	3	5	1				1	5		1	7	O		1	1	2		1										1				1	1		
5		1	3	5	1				1	8		1	7	EO	1		0	3		1										1			1			1	
6	1		3	5		1			1	6		1	7	EO	1		0	2	1		7	1		1				1		1				1	1		1
7	1		3	6	1				1	4		1	7	EO		1	0	3	1		5	1		1	1			1		1			1				
8	1		3	5	1				1	8		1	7	EO	1		0	2	1		1	1		1	1		1	1		1				1		1	1
9	1		3	6		1		1		3		1	7	AO		1	0	4	1		5	1		1			1			1			1		1		1
10		1	2	4		1		1		14		1	7	EO		1	0	2	1		7	1		1	1		1				1						1
11		1	2	2		1		1		4	1		7	HEO		1	1	1	1		7	1		1	1		1	1	1	1				1		1	1
12	1		3	4		1		1		7		1	7	EO		1	0	5	1		2	1		1			1			1				1		1	1
13	1		3	5	1				1	6		1	7	EO		1	1	5	1		5	1		1	1			1		1			1		1		1
14		1	2	1			1	1		8		1	7	7		1	0	1		1										1			1		1		1
15	1		1	1		1			1	14		1	7	HEO	1		0	2		1										1			1		1		
16	1		2	2		1		1		15		1	7	O		1	1	1		1										1				1		1	1
17		1	2	2	1				1	14		1	7	EO	1		2	2	1		1	1		1	1	1	1	1			1			1		1		1
18	1		3	7	1				1	3		1	7	AO		1	0	8	1		6	1		1	1					1				1	1		1
19		1	3	1	1			1		8		1	7	7		1	0	2		1										1			1			1	
20		1	3	5		1		1		6		1	7	EO	1		2	3	1		5	1		1			1				1			1		1		1
21		1	3	4	1				1	6		1	O	O	1		0	2		1										1			1		1		1
22		1	2	4	1				1	13		1	7	EO		1	0	2		1										1			1				1
23		1	3	4		1		1		13		1	7	EO	1		1	2	1		1		1							1				1	1		1
24	1		1	1	1			1		8		1	7	7		1	0	2		1										1			1		1		1
25	1		4	7		1			1	12	1		7	AA		1	1	8		1										1			1		1		
26		1	3	5	1				1	6	1		7	AO	1		1	3	1		2	1		1	1			1				1			1		1
27	1		3	7		1		1		12	1		7	AA		1	3	8		1										1			1		1		1
28	1		2	4	1				1	6		1	7	EO	1		0	2		1										1			1		1		1
29	1		3	5	1				1	14		1	7	O	1		0	2	1		1	1		1	1	1	1	1				1			1		1
30	1		1	1	1			1		6		1	7	EO		1	0	1		1										1			1			1	1
31	1		2	3	1				1	6		1	7	O		1	1	1		1											1						1
32	1		4	7		1		1		13	1		O	EO		1	1	6	1		3	1		1	1						1						
33	1		3	3		1		1		15	1		7	HEO		1	1	1		1										1					1		1
34		1	3	1	1			1		1		1	7	SEO		1	1	1		1											1					1	

APPENDIX V – SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE: Example of Data Entries

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT QUESTIONNAIRE
Basic Details

Training and Development Needs																																						
Q22												Q24					25			Q27		Q28		Q29			Q30		Q32				Q34		
Training and dev provided												Trg & Dev Planned					IIP?			White Paper		WP Rel'nt		Trg Strat ?			Strat Com		Career M'ment				How Real?		
2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	A	W	D	Y	N	R	N	Y	N	D	Y	N	1	2	3	4	V	Q	N
											1	1	1				1				1					1		1							
											1	1					1				1			1			1				1				1	
											1	1	1				1			1		1			1				1						1	
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1	1					1					1		1				1			1		1			1									1	
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				1				1			1	1	1				1			1		1			1		1					1			
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	1										1							1		1					1		1				1			

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE
SCHEDULE OF FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS

Name & Location of Department/Agency	Date and Time of Interview	Grade of Interviewee	Survey Respondent	Line Manager
Military Survey Agency, Tolworth, Surrey	2nd February 1999 - 10.30 a.m.	HEO	✓	
Dept for Education & Employment, Caxton House, London	3rd February 1999 - 11.00 a.m. 10th May 1999 - 10.30 a.m.	HEO GRADE 7	✓ ✓	
Dept of Environment, Transport and the Regions, Eland House, London	3rd February 1999 - 14.00 p.m. 20th April 1999 - 11.00 a.m.	HEO GRADE 7	✓ ✓	
Intervention Board, Reading	5th February 1999 - 10.00 a.m. 27th April 1999 - 10.15 a.m.	HEO SEO	✓	 ✓
Central Office of Information, Hercules House, London	1st March 1999 - 10.30 a.m.	HEO	✓	
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Nobel House, London	1st March 1999 - 14.00 p.m. 1st March 1999 - 15.45 p.m.	HEO SEO	✓	 ✓

Health and Safety Executive Rose Court, London	2nd March 1999 - 10.30 a.m.	SEO	✓	
Customs & Excise, Dorset House, London	2nd March 1999 - 14.30 p.m.	HEO	✓	
Dept of Culture, Media & Sport Cockspur Street, London	3rd March 1999 - 10.30 a.m.	HEO	✓	
Government Office for East Midlands, Nottingham	22 March 1999 - 12.30 p.m.	HEO	✓	
Department of Health London	23rd March 1999 - 10.30 a.m. 19th April 1999 - 14.00 p.m. 12th May 1999 - 15.30 p.m.	SEO GRADE 7 GRADE 3	✓ ✓	 ✓
Benefits Agency, London	23rd March 1999 - 13.30 p.m. 12th May 1999 - 11.00 a.m.	HEO HEO	 ✓	✓
Court Service, Southside, London	24th March 1999 - 10.00 a.m.	SEO	✓	
Dept of Trade and Industry Kingsgate House, London	15th April 1999 - 15.00 p.m. 26th April 1999 - 15.30 p.m.	SEO GRADE 7	✓	 ✓

Department of Social Security The Adelphi, London	19th April 1999 - 11.30 a.m.	GRADE 7	✓	
Ministry of Defence Old War Building, London	21st April 1999 - 10.30 a.m.	GRADE 7	✓	
National Savings, Charles House, London	20th April 1999 - 14.00 p.m.	HEO	✓	

APPENDIX VII – FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS: Suggested Questions

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF MIDDLE MANAGERS IN THE NEW CIVIL SERVICE RESEARCH SURVEY

FOLLOW UP INTERVIEWS

Suggested Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews

Respondent's Interviews

1. Organisational Strategy
Changing Business Objectives

- How are departmental/agency business objectives communicated to managers in your organisation?
- Do you have your own operational objectives for this reporting year? If so, how is your achievement against objectives measured?
- In what way (if at all) would you say that your organisation has become more business focused in recent years?
- What is that you do differently as a manager because of this change in focus?
- Who do you regard as being the customers of your organisation?
- How have customers influenced service delivery and what has this meant for your training and development needs?
- What quality initiatives are being pursued at the moment?
- Are there any new financial initiatives and if so, what are they?
- How do you feel you are coping with these new demands on your job? Would more training and development help you to cope better?

Impact of Change on the Jobs of Middle Managers

- How has your workload and level of responsibility changed in the past few years? Please try to be specific about work volumes and staffing.
- What performance measures are used in your organisation?
- Do you feel that your involvement in performance management has changed as a result of shifting business objectives? If so, how?
- What has been the impact of new technology on your job?
- Would you say that there has been a move towards team working in your organisation?
- How are teams in your organisation composed and what sort of training and development needs (if any) have been identified for team members as a result of this different way of working?
- Has your line management role changed in any way at all?
- Have you needed to adapt your own management style and if so how?
- How are you managing your own career?

2. Training Strategy

Systems and Procedures

- What systems and procedures are in place in your organisation to make sure that you get the training and development that you need?
- Would you say that these systems and procedures are effective?
- How are managers kept up-to-date with the organisation's training strategy?

Training and Development Needs

- How would you rate your own level of satisfaction with the training and development that you have received?
- What do you think is the biggest area of shortfall in your own training and development?
- Are you studying for any further academic or vocational qualifications at present? If so, what has prompted you to take this course of action?

3. Linking Mechanisms

Investors in People

- Where is your organisation in the accreditation process?
- How has this initiative affected your organisation and you?
- Would you say that IiP has made any difference to the training and development provided in your organisation? If so, how?
- Have there been any changes to communication systems (formal and informal) as a result of this initiative? If so, what are they?
- Has the volume of paperwork you handle as a manager increased? By what amount?

Personal Development Plans

- Do personal development plans exist in your organisation?
- Do you have one and are you following it? If not, why not?

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF MIDDLE MANAGERS IN THE NEW CIVIL SERVICE RESEARCH SURVEY

FOLLOW UP INTERVIEWS

Suggested Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews

Line Manager Interviews

1. Organisational Strategy
Changing Business Objectives

- How are departmental/agency business objectives communicated to managers in your organisation?
- How do you personally consider the implication of any changing objectives on the training and development needs of your staff?
- What procedures are there in place for you to bid for training resources?

Impact of Change on the Jobs of Middle Managers

- What is your view of the work demands placed on the people that you manage?
- Do you consider that jobs are more challenging now than they used to be? If yes, in what way?
- How would you rate morale in your bit of the organisation?

2. Training Strategy
Systems and Procedures

- Does your organisation have a training strategy? If yes, do you know what it contains?
- What do you feel is the degree of fit between the organisational strategy and training strategy in your department/agency?
- What is your biggest challenge in making sure that training and development is effective in your managerial command?

Training and Development Needs

- How frequently do you review the work of people in your team?
- What sort of performance objectives do you incorporate in these reviews?
- How do you identify the training and development needs of your staff?
- What training and development methods do you generally use?

3. Linking Mechanisms

Investors in People

- How has IiP affected your managerial role?
- What do you consider are the advantages and disadvantages of IiP accreditation?
- Do you think that your staff are any better trained as a result of this initiative? Please give reasons for your answer.

Personal Development Plans

- Do you and your staff have personal development plans?
- If yes, how do you review the effectiveness of the plans?